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THE SONG OF BEOWULF



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R.K. GORDON

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INTRODUCTION

ONE of the precious things in the British Museum is an old manuscript book containing the poem *Beowulf*. It is the only Old English poem of heroic exploits that has come down to us complete. It has survived not because it was necessarily the best, but simply because it was luckier than other poems which have been wholly lost, or of which only fragments remain. The stories of Walter of Aquitaine and of Finn were as good or better than *Beowulf*, but only a few lines are left—just enough to make us wish for more. *Beowulf*, then, is not only a good thing in itself, but is also the only thing of its kind. It is the best thing English poetry has to show before the Norman Conquest and for long after.

Yet this English poem is not about Englishmen or England. The men and women in the story are mostly Danes and Geats, and the adventures take place in the home of the Geats in the South of Sweden, and in Hrothgar's hall in the island of Seeland. At first sight this seems strange, and some have thought that the poem is merely a translation of a Scandinavian original, and therefore only English in a partial sense. But another explanation is probably nearer the truth. When the English were still on the Continent they and their neighbours knew and told

a great many stories of heroic deeds. These stories and their heroes did not belong to any one people; the Scandinavians knew them as well as the Angles and Saxons. They were a common possession of the Germanic tribes. When the Angles and Saxons came to England they brought these tales with them along with their other possessions, and out of some of them made poems such as *Beowulf*.

We do not know the author of the poem, nor can we be sure of its date. Probably it was made a little before or after 700. In this poem, written twelve hundred years ago, we are shown a way of living very different from the one we know. It is not even the world of the year 700, for, even if the poem was made then, it refers back to an earlier time. Hygelac, King of the Geats, for instance, was an historical prince, and he was killed early in the sixth century.

In some ways, then, the poem seems very remote from us. A summary of the plot sounds like a nursery tale of marvels. The three exploits of Beowulf—the killing of Grendel and Grendel's mother and the fight with the fire-breathing dragon—belong to the same family as the adventures of Jack the Giant Killer. Yet the poem is very different from such stories. Some of the adventures are fantastic, but the men and women seem real, substantial persons. Several of them are actually historical. They are not like the people in fairy tales. For one thing, they speak differently. "I shall achieve a mighty deed fit for an earl, or suffer my death in this mead-

hall," says Beowulf. The heroes of the fairy tales do not speak with this heroic dignity. The persons in *Beowulf* belong to an old heroic age which came to an end about the middle of the sixth century—they have the same reality and dignity as the men and women of the still older heroic age of Greece, reflected in the poetry of Homer.

One feature of the age constantly referred to in *Beowulf* is the frequency of feuds. The Danes have a feud with Finn of the Frisians and with Ingeld of the Heathobards; Hygelac loses his life in a raid on the Hetware, and the wars between Geats and Swedes are mentioned several times. In such a world a chief naturally prized the loyalty of his men, and it is a quality singled out for praise in the poem. Beowulf is a proud and devoted follower of his kinsman Hygelac. He is glad that his exploits will bring fame to his prince as well as to himself. After Hygelac's death, instead of seizing the throne himself, he protects the young heir Heardred. The prince is expected to repay such loyalty with generosity. Hrothgar is called the Giver of Rings; one of the charges against the bad king, Heremod, is that he did not give presents to the Danes. But the hero undertakes an adventure such as cleansing Heorot of monsters not merely for rewards. What he cares most about is fame: "Each must lose his life in this world; let him who can achieve glory ere death! When life has gone that will be best for a noble warrior."

These old heroic stories are fond of showing a man fighting against odds—Beowulf waiting in Heorot for Grendel and disdaining to use sword or armour—this is the sort of situation the old poets liked. The heroic creed is finely given in the Old English poem on the Battle of Maldon: "Thought shall be the braver, heart the bolder, courage the greater, as our strength grows less." This spirit can be found in our poetry and in our race in later days. Tennyson's Ulysses has the same proud fortitude as Beowulf:

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

The life described in *Beowulf* has its own nobility and splendour. One of the best scenes is that where Hrothgar's queen, Wealtheow, goes, gold-adorned, through the great hall among the old and young warriors, bearing the mead-cup and giving courteous greeting to the Danes and to the visiting Geats. Or a minstrel sings clear-voiced in Heorot of heroic deeds to the music of the harp. In such scenes *Beowulf* shows the same sort of dignity as we find in Homer. The difference is one of degree, not of kind.

In this poem are many references to Christianity. Some of these seem strangely incongruous. Hrothgar's minstrel sings a religious poem about the Creation, and yet Beowulf is cremated with pagan ceremonies. This mixture of pagan and Christian usages and

beliefs has been explained in several ways. Some think that the Christian passages were not in the poem at first but were added by a later hand. We cannot be certain, but it is possible that they were the work of the original poet. Christianity did not at once drive out the older faith and ideas. The Christian King Alfred loved to listen to the old Saxon songs. For a time the old and the new existed side by side in England, as they do in this English poem. A little later Old English poetry dealt almost entirely with Christian subjects, and the monk in his cell turned poet and replaced the minstrel in hall.

The English of *Beowulf* is practically a foreign language to us. Twelve hundred years have brought great changes in vocabulary, inflexions, pronunciation, and system of gender. The kind of verse is also old-fashioned. Rhyme is not used, but each line is broken in the middle and the two halves are joined by alliteration. For example:

Sweord wæs swätig; secg weorce gefeh

(Sword was bloody; The man in the work rejoiced).

This old verse was replaced by the rhyming metres which the Norman French brought with them, but somehow the secret was not forgotten. In the fourteenth century, when England had at last in Chaucer a great master of the new metres, the old alliterative fashion reappeared and made a glorious end in *Piers Plowman* and other poems.

DANISH ROYAL FAMILY

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graph TD
    A[Scyld Scefing] --> B[Beowulf I.]
    B --> C[Healfdene]
    C --> D[Heorogar]
    C --> E["Hrothgar  
m. Wealtheow"]
    C --> F[Halga]
    D --> G[Heoroweard]
    E --> H[Hrethric]
    E --> I[Hrothmund]
    E --> J["Freawaru  
m. Ingeld, son of Froda"]
    F --> K[Hrothulf]

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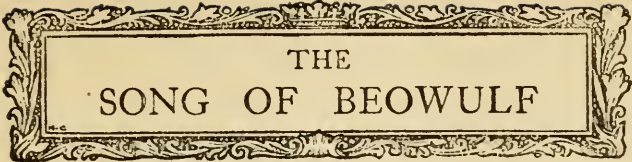
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graph TD
    Swerting --> Hrethel
    Hrethel --> Herebeald
    Hrethel --> Hæthcyn
    Hrethel --> Hygelac
    Hrethel --> Daughter1["a daughter  
m. Ecgtheow"]
    Hygelac --> m_Hygd["m. Hygd"]
    m_Hygd --> Daughter2["a daughter  
who m. Eofor"]
    m_Hygd --> Heardred
    Daughter1 --> BeowulfII["Beowulf II."]
  
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graph TD
    Scylf --> Ongentheow
    Ongentheow --> Onela
    Ongentheow --> Ohtere
    Ohtere --> Eanmund
    Ohtere --> Eadgils

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THE SONG OF BEOWULF

I

Lo! we have heard the glory of the kings of the Spear-Danes in days gone by, how the chieftains wrought mighty deeds. Often Scyld-Scefing wrested the mead-benches from troops of foes, from many tribes; he made fear fall upon the earls. After he was first found in misery (he received solace for that), he grew up under the heavens, lived in high honour, until each of his neighbours over the whale-road must needs obey him and render tribute. That was a good king! Later a young son was born to him in the court, God sent him for a comfort to the people; He had marked the misery of that earlier time when they suffered long space, lacking a leader. Wherefore the Lord of life, the Ruler of glory, gave him honour in the world.

Beowulf was renowned; the repute of Scyld's son spread far and wide in Scandinavian lands. Thus shall a young man bring good to pass in his father's house with splendid gifts, so that when war comes willing comrades shall stand by him again in his old age, the people follow him. In every tribe a man shall prosper by deeds of love.

Beowulf was renowned. This Beowulf must not be confused with the hero of the poem.

Then at the fated hour Scyld, very brave, passed hence into the Lord's protection. Then did they, his dear comrades, bear him out to the shore of the sea, as he himself had besought them, whilst as friend of the Scyldings, loved lord of the land, he held sway with speech. There at the haven stood the ring-prowed ship radiant and ready, the chieftain's vessel. Then they laid down the loved lord, the bestowers of rings on the bosom of the barge, the famous man by the mast. Many treasures and ornaments were there, brought from afar. I never heard of a sightlier ship adorned with weapons of war and garments of battle, swords and corslets. Many treasures lay on his bosom that were to pass far with him into the power of the flood. No whit less did they furnish him with gifts, with great costly stores than did those who sent him forth in the beginning while he was still a child alone over the waves. Further they set a golden banner high over his head; they let the ocean bear him; they surrendered him to the sea. Sad was their mind, mournful their mood. Men cannot tell for a truth, counsellors in hall, heroes under the heavens, who received that burden.

II

THEN Beowulf of the Scyldings, beloved king of the people, was famed among warriors long time in the strongholds—his father had passed hence, the prince

from his home—until noble Healfdene was born to him; aged and fierce in fight, he ruled the Scyldings graciously while he lived. Four children sprang from him in succession. Heorogar, prince of troops, and Hrothgar, and Halga the good; I heard that Sigeneow was Sæwela's queen, consort of the war-Scyfling. Then good fortune in war was granted to Hrothgar, glory in battle, so that his kinsmen gladly obeyed him, until the younger warriors grew to be a mighty band.

It came into his mind that he would order men to make a hall-building, a mighty mead-dwelling, greater than ever the children of men had heard of; and therein that he should part among young and old all which God gave unto him except the nation and the lives of men. Then I heard far and wide of work laid upon many a tribe throughout this world, the task of adorning the place of assembly. Quickly it came to pass among men that it was perfect; the greatest of hall-dwellings; he whose word had wide sway gave it the name of Heorot. He broke not his pledge, he bestowed bracelets and treasure at the banquet. The hall towered up, lofty and wide-gabled; it endured the surges of battle, of hostile fire. The time was not yet come when the feud

Heorot. The site of Heorot or Hart-Hall was probably that of the modern village of Leire on the Island of Seeland.

The time was not yet come, etc. This refers to the feud between Hrothgar and his son-in-law Ingeld mentioned later in the poem.

between son-in-law and father-in-law was fated to flare out after deadly hostility.

Then the mighty spirit who dwelt in darkness angrily endured the torment of hearing each day high revel in the hall. There was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the minstrel. He who could tell of men's beginning from olden times spoke of how the Almighty wrought the world, the earth bright in its beauty as far as the water surrounds it; the Victorious One established the brightness of sun and moon for a light to dwellers in the land, and adorned the face of the earth with branches and leaves; He also created life of all kinds which move and live. Thus the noble warriors lived in pleasure and plenty, until a fiend in hell began to contrive malice. The grim spirit was called Grendel, a famous march-stepper, who held the moors, the fen and the fastness. The hapless creature sojourned for a space in the sea-monsters' home after the Creator had condemned him. The eternal Lord avenged the murder on the race of Cain, because he slew Abel. He did not rejoice in that feud. He, the Lord, drove him far from mankind for that crime. Thence sprang all evil spawn, ogres and elves and sea-monsters, giants too, who struggled long time against God. He paid them requital for that.

Deadly hostility. See Sections xxix. and xxx.

III

HE went then when night fell to visit the high house, to see how the Ring-Danes had disposed themselves in it after the beer-banquet. Then he found therein the band of chieftains slumbering after the feast; they knew not sorrow, the misery of men, aught of misfortune. Straightway he was ready, grim and ravenous, savage and raging; and seized thirty thanes on their couches. Thence he departed homewards again, exulting in booty, to find out his dwelling with his fill of slaughter.

Then at dawn with the breaking of day the war-might of Grendel was made manifest to men; then after the feasting arose lamentation, a loud cry in the morning. The renowned ruler, the prince long famous, sat empty of joy; bitterly he suffered, sorrowed for his men when they saw the track of the hateful monster, the evil spirit. That struggle was too hard, too hateful, and lasting. After no longer lapse than one night again he wrought still more murders, violence and malice, and mourned not for it; he was too bent on that. Then that man was easy to find who sought elsewhere for himself a more remote resting-place, a bed after the banquet, when the hate of the hall-visitant was shown to him, truly declared by a plain token; after that he kept himself further off, and more securely. He escaped the fiend.

Thus one against all prevailed and pitted himself

against right until the peerless house stood unpeopled. That was a weary while. For the space of twelve winters the friend of the Scyldings bitterly suffered every woe, deep sorrows; wherefore it came to be known to people, to the children of men, sadly in songs, that Grendel waged long war with Hrothgar; many years he bore bitter hatred, violence and malice, an unflagging feud; peace he would not have with any man of Danish race, nor lay aside murderous death, nor consent to be bought off. Nor did any of the councillors make bold to expect fairer conditions from the hands of the slayer; but the monster, the deadly creature, was hostile to warriors young and old; he plotted and planned. Many nights he held the misty moors. Men do not know whither the demons go in their wanderings.

Thus the foe of men, the dread lone visitant, oftentimes wrought many works of malice, sore injuries; in the dark nights he dwelt in Heorot, the treasure-decked hall. He might not approach the throne, the precious thing for fear of the Lord, nor did he know his purpose.

That was heavy sorrow, misery of mind for the friend of the Scyldings. Many a mighty one sat often in council; they held debate what was best for bold-minded men to do against sudden terrors. Sometimes in their temples they vowed sacrifices,

He might . . . purpose. An obscure passage, admitting many interpretations, none of them very satisfactory.

Friend of the Scyldings. Scyldings is a name for the Danes. The friend of the Scyldings is Hrothgar.

they petitioned with prayers that the slayer of souls should succour them for the people's distress. Such was their wont, the hope of the heathen. Their thoughts turned to hell; they knew not the Lord, the Judge of deeds; they wist not the Lord God; nor in truth could they praise the Protector of the heavens, the Ruler of glory. Woe is it for him who must needs send forth his soul in unholiness and fear into the embrace of the fire, hope for no solace, suffer no change! Well is it for him who may after the day of death seek the Lord, and crave shelter in the Father's embrace!

IV

THUS the son of Healfdene was ever troubled with care; nor could the sage hero sweep aside his sorrows. That struggle was too hard, too hateful and lasting, which fell on the people,—fierce hostile oppression, greatest of night-woes.

Hygelac's thane, a valiant man among the Geats, heard of that at home, of the deeds of Grendel. He was the greatest in might among men at that time, noble and powerful. He bade a good ship to be built for him; he said that he was set on seeking the war-like king, the famous prince over the swan-road, since he had need of men. No whit did wise men blame him for the venture, though he was dear to them; they urged on the staunch-minded man, they

sought out good omens. The valiant man had chosen warriors of the men of the Geats, the boldest he could find; with fourteen others he sought the ship. A man cunning in knowledge of the sea showed the way along the edge of the land.

Time passed on; the ship was on the waves, the boat beneath the cliff. The warriors eagerly embarked. The currents turned the sea against the sand. Men bore bright ornaments, splendid war-trappings to the bosom of the ship. The men, the heroes on their willing venture, shoved out the well-timbered ship. The foamy-necked floater like a bird went then over the wave-filled sea, sped by the wind, till after due time on the next day the boat with twisted prow had gone so far that the voyagers saw land, the sea-cliffs shining, the steep headlands, the broad sea-capes. Then the sea was traversed, the journey at an end. The men of the Weders mounted thence quickly to the land; they made fast the ship. The armour rattled, the garments of battle. They thanked God that the sea voyage had been easy for them.

Then the watchman of the Scyldings whose duty it was to guard the sea-cliffs saw from the height bright shields and battle-equipment ready for use borne over the gangway. A desire to know who the men were pressed on his thoughts. The Thane of Hrothgar went to the shore riding his steed; mightily he brandished his spear in his hands, spoke forth a question: "What warriors are ye, clad in corslets,

Men of the Weders. Weders is another name for the Geats.

who have come thus bringing the high ship over the way of waters, hither over the floods? Lo! for a time I have been guardian of our coasts, I have kept watch by the sea lest any of the Danes' enemies should make ravage with their sea-raiders. No shield-bearing warriors have ventured here more openly; nor do ye know at all that ye have the permission of warriors, the consent of kinsmen. I never saw in the world a greater earl than one of your band is, a hero in his harness. He is no stay-at-home decked out with weapons; unless his face belies him, his excellent front. Now I must know your race rather than ye should go further hence as spies in the land of the Danes. Now, ye far-dwellers, travellers of the sea, hearken but to my thought. It is best to tell forth quickly whence ye are come."

V

THE eldest answered him; the leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard: "We are men of the race of the Geats and hearth-companions of Hygelac. My father was famed among the peoples, a noble high prince called Ecgtheow; he sojourned many winters ere he passed away, the old man from his dwelling. Far and wide throughout the earth every wise man remembers him well. We have come with gracious intent to seek out thy lord, the son of

Healfdene, the protector of his people. Be kindly to us in counsel. We have a great errand to the famous man, to the prince of the Danes. Nor shall anything be hidden there, I hope. Thou knowest if the truth is as indeed we heard tell, that some sort of foe, a secret pursuer, works on the dark nights evil, hatred, injury and slaughter, spreading terror. I can give Hrothgar counsel from a generous mind, how he may overcome the enemy wisely and well, if for him the torment of ills should ever cease, relief come again, and the surges of care grow cooler; or if he shall ever after suffer a time of misery and pain while the best of houses stands there in its lofty station."

The watchman spoke, the fearless servant, where he sat his steed—a bold shield-warrior who ponders well shall pass judgment on both words and deeds: "I hear that this is a troop friendly to the prince of the Scyldings. Go forth and bear weapons and trappings; I will guide you. Likewise I will bid my henchmen honourably guard your vessel against all enemies, your newly-tarred ship on the sand, until once more the boat with twisted prow shall bear the beloved man to the coast of the Weders, those of the valiant ones to whom it shall be vouchsafed to escape unscathed from the rush of battle."

They went on their way then. The ship remained at rest; the broad-bosomed vessel was bound by a rope, fast at anchor. The boar-images shone over the cheek

The boar-images shone. Images of boars on the tops of the helmets.

armour, decked with gold; gay with colour and hardened by fire they gave protection to the brave men. The warriors hastened, went up together, until they could see the well-built hall, splendid and gold-adorned. That was foremost of buildings under the heavens for men of the earth, in which the mighty one dwelt; the light shone over many lands.

The man bold in battle pointed out to them the abode of brave men, as it gleamed, so that they could go thither. One of the warriors turned his horse, then spoke a word. "It is time for me to go. The Almighty Father guard you by His grace safe in your venture. I will to the sea to keep watch for a hostile horde."

VI

THE street was paved with stones of various colours, the road kept the warriors together. The war corslet shone, firmly hand-locked, the gleaming iron rings sang in the armour as they came on their way in their trappings of war even to the hall. Weary from the sea, they set down their broad shields, their stout targes against the wall of the building; they sat down on the bench then. The corslets rang out, the warriors' armour. The spears, the weapons of seamen, of ash wood grey at the tip, stood all together. The armed band was adorned with war-gear. Then a haughty hero asked the men of battle as to their lineage: "Whence bear ye plated shields, grey

corslets and masking helmets, this pile of spears? I am Hrothgar's messenger and herald. I have not seen so many men of strange race more brave in bearing. I suppose ye have sought Hrothgar from pride, by no means as exiles but with high minds."

The bold man, proud prince of the Weders, answered him, spoke a word in reply, stern under his helmet: "We are Hygelac's table-companions; Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell my errand to the son of Healfdene, the famous prince, thy lord, if he will grant that we may greet him who is so gracious." Wulfgar spoke—he was a man of the Wendels; his courage, his bravery and his wisdom had been made known to many: "I will ask the friend of the Danes, the prince of the Scyldings, the giver of rings, the renowned ruler about thy venture as thou desirest, and speedily make known to thee the answer which the gracious one thinks fit to give me." He turned quickly then to where Hrothgar sat, aged and grey-haired, amid the band of earls; the bold man went till he stood before the shoulders of the Danish prince; he knew courtly custom. Wulfgar spoke to his gracious master: "Men of the Geats, come from afar, have been brought here over the stretch of the ocean. The warriors call the eldest one Beowulf. They request, my lord, that they may exchange words with thee. Refuse them not thy answer, gracious Hrothgar. They seem in their war-gear worthy of respect from the noble-born. Of a truth the leader is valiant who guided the heroes hither."

VII

HROTHGAR spoke, the protector of the Scyldings: "I knew him when he was a youth. His aged father was called Ecgtheow; to him Hrethel of the Geats gave his only daughter in marriage. His son has now come here boldly, has sought a gracious friend. Then seafaring men, who brought precious gifts of the Geats hither as a present, said that he, mighty in battle, had the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand. May Holy God in His graciousness send him to us, to the West-Danes, as I hope, against the terror of Grendel. I shall offer treasures to the valiant one for his courage. Do thou hasten, bid them enter to see the friendly band all together; tell them also with words that they are welcome arrivals to the people of the Danes." Then Wulfgar went toward the door of the hall, spoke a word in the door-way: "My victorious lord, prince of the East-Danes, bade me tell you that he knows your lineage, and that ye, bold in mind, are welcome arrivals hither over the sea-surges. Now ye may go in your war-gear under battle-helmets to see Hrothgar; let your battle-shields, spears, deadly shafts, await here the issue of the speaking."

The mighty one rose then, around him many a warrior, excellent troop of thanes. Some waited there, kept watch over their trappings, as the bold

man bade them. They hastened together, as the warrior guided, under the roof of Heorot; the man, resolute in mind, stern under his helmet, went till he stood within the hall. Beowulf spoke—on him his corslet shone, the shirt of mail sewn by the art of the smith. “Hail to thee Hrothgar! I am Hygelac’s kinsman and thane. I have in my youth undertaken many heroic deeds. The ravages of Grendel were made known to me in my native land. Sea-farers say that this hall, the noblest building, stands unpeopled and profitless to all warriors, after the light of evening is hidden under cover of heaven. Then my people counselled me, the best of men in their wisdom, that I should seek thee, Prince Hrothgar: because they knew the power of my strength, they saw it themselves, when I came out of battles, blood-stained from my foes, where I bound five, ruined the race of the monsters and slew by night the sea beasts mid the waves, suffered sore need, avenged the wrong of the Weders, killed the foes—they embarked on an unlucky venture. And now alone I shall achieve the exploit against Grendel, the monster, the giant. I wish now at this time to ask thee one boon, prince of the Bright-Danes, protector of the Scyldings: that thou, defence of warriors, friendly prince of the people, wilt not refuse me, now I have come thus far, that I and my band of earls, this bold troop, may cleanse Heorot unaided. I have also heard that the monster in his madness cares naught for weapons; wherefore I

scorn to bear sword or broad shield, yellow targe to the battle, so may Hygelac my lord be gracious in mind to me; but with my grip I shall seize the fiend and strive for his life, foe against foe. There he whom death takes must needs trust to the judging of the Lord. I think that he is minded, if he can bring it to pass, to devour fearlessly in the battle-hall the people of the Geats, the flower of men, as he often has done. Not at all dost thou need to protect my head, but if death takes me he will have me drenched in blood; he will carry off the bloody corpse, will think to hide it; the lone-goer will feed without mourning, he will stain the moor-refuges. No longer needst thou sorrow for the keeping of my body. Send to Hygelac, if battle takes me off, the best of battle-garments that arms my breast, the finest of corslets. That is a heritage from Hrethel, the work of Weland. Fate ever goes as it must."

VIII

HROTHGAR spoke, the protector of the Scyldings: "Thou hast sought us, my friend Beowulf, for battle and from graciousness. Thy father brought about by fight the greatest of feuds; he became the slayer

The work of Weland. Weland, the maker of Beowulf's coat of mail, is a famous smith in Germanic legend. Cf. Wayland Smith in Scott's *Kenilworth*.

of Heatholaf among the Wulfings; then the race of the Weders would not receive him because of threatening war. Thence he sought the people of the South-Danes, the honourable Scyldings, over the surging of the waves. Then I had just begun to rule the Danish people and in youth held a wide-stretched kingdom, a stronghold of heroes. Then Heregar was dead, my elder kinsman, the son of Healfdene had ceased to live; he was better than I. Afterwards I ended the feud with money; I sent old treasures to the Wulfings over the back of the water; he swore oaths to me. It is sorrow for me in my mind to tell any man what malice and sudden onslaughts Grendel has wrought on Heorot with his hostile thoughts. Thinned is my troop in hall, my war-band. Fate swept them away to the dread Grendel. God may easily part the bold enemy from his deeds.

“Full often did warriors drunken with beer boast over the ale-cup that they would await Grendel’s attack with dread blades in the beer-hall. Then in the morning, when day dawned, this mead-hall, the troop-hall, was stained with blood; all the ale-benches drenched with gore, the hall with blood shed in battle. I had so many the less trusty men, dear veterans, since death had carried off these. Sit down now at the banquet, and at a fitting season secure fame of victory for the thanes as thy mind prompts.”

Then a bench was cleared in the beer-hall for the men of the Geats together; there the bold-minded ones went and sat down, exceeding proud. A thane

who bore in his hands the decked ale-cup performed the office, poured out the gleaming beer. At times the minstrel sang clearly in Heorot; there was joy of heroes, a great band of warriors, Danes and Weders.

IX

UNFERTH spoke, son of Ecglaf, who sat at the feet of the prince of the Scyldings. He began dispute—the journey of Beowulf, the brave sea-farer, was a great bitterness to him, because he did not grant that any other man in the world accomplished greater exploits under heaven than he himself: “Art thou that Beowulf who strove with Breca, contended on the wide sea for the prize in swimming, where ye two tried the floods in your pride, and risked your lives in the deep water from presumption? Nor could any man, friend or foe, prevent the sorrowful journey; then ye two swam on the sea, where ye plied the ocean-streams with your arms, measured the sea-paths, threw aside the sea with your hands, glided over the surge; the deep raged with its waves, with its wintry flood. Seven nights ye toiled in the power of the water; he outstripped thee in swimming, had greater strength. Then in the morning the sea bore him to the land of the Heathoremes. Thence, dear to his people, he sought his loved country, the land of the Brondings, the

fair stronghold, where he ruled over people, castle and rings. The son of Beanstan in truth fulfilled all his pledge to thee. Wherefore I expect a worse fate for thee, though everywhere thou hast withstood battle-rushes, grim war, if thou durst await Grendel throughout the night near at hand."

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "Lo! thou hast spoken a great deal, friend Unferth, about Breca, drunken as thou art with beer; thou hast told of his journey. I count it as truth that I had greater might in the sea, hardships mid the waves, than any other man.

"We arranged that and made bold, while we were youths—we were both then still in our boyhood—that we two should risk our lives out on the sea; and thus we accomplished that. We held naked swords boldly in our hands when we swam in the ocean; we thought to protect ourselves against the whales. In no wise could he swim far from me on the waves of the flood, more quickly on the sea; I would not consent to leave him. Then we were together on the sea for the space of five nights till the flood forced us apart, the surging sea, coldest of storms, darkening night, and a wind from the north, battle-grim, came against us. Wild were the waves; the temper of the sea-monsters was stirred. There did my shirt of mail hard-locked by hand stand me in good stead against foes; the woven battle-garment, adorned with gold, lay on my breast. A spotted deadly foe drew me to the depths, had me firmly

and fiercely in his grip; yet it was granted to me that I pierced the monster with my point, my battle spear. The rush of battle carried off the mighty sea-monster by my hand."

X

"THUS oftentimes malicious foes pressed me hard. I served them with my good sword, as was fitting. They had not joy of their feasting, the evil doers, when they seized me. They sat round the banquet near the bottom of the sea; but in the morning they lay cast up on the shore, wounded with swords, laid low by blades, so that no longer they hindered sea-farers on their voyage over the high flood. Light came from the east, bright beacon of God. The surges sank down, so that I could behold the sea-capes, the windy headlands. Fate often succours the doomed warrior when his valour is strong.

~~"Yet it was my fortune to slay with the sword~~ nine sea-monsters. I have not heard under the arching sky of heaven of harder fighting by night, nor of a more hapless man in the streams of ocean. Yet I escaped with my life from the grasp of foes, weary of travel. Then the sea, the flood, the raging surges bore me to the shore in the land of the Finns.

"I have not heard such exploits told of thee, dread deeds, terror of swords; never yet did Breca

or either of you two in the play of battle perform so bold a deed with gleaming blades—I do not boast of the struggle—though thou camest to be the murderer of thy brother, thy near kinsman. For that thou must needs suffer damnation in hell, though thy wit is strong. Forsooth, I tell thee, son of Ecglaf, that Grendel, the fearful monster, had never achieved so many dread deeds against thy prince, malice on Heorot, if thy thoughts and mind had been as daring as thou thyself sayest. But he has found out that he need not sorely dread the feud, the terrible sword-battle of your people, the victorious Scyldings; he takes pledges by force, he spares none of the Danish people, but he lives in pleasure, sleeps and feasts; he looks for no fight from the Spear-Danes. But soon now I shall show him battle, the might and courage of the Geats. He who may will go afterwards, brave to the mead, when the morning light of another day, the sun clothed with sky-like brightness, shines from the south over the children of men.”

Then glad was the giver of treasure, grey-haired and famed in battle; the prince of the Bright-Danes trusted in aid; the protector of the people heard in Beowulf a resolute purpose. There was laughter of heroes; talk was heard; words were winsome.

Wealtheow went forth, Hrothgar’s queen, mindful of what was fitting; gold-adorned, she greeted the warriors in hall; and the free-born woman first offered the goblet to the guardian of the East-Danes;

bade him be of good cheer at the beer-banquet, be dear to his people. He gladly took part in the banquet and received the hall-goblet, the king mighty in victory. Then the woman of the Helmings went about everywhere among old and young warriors, proffered the precious cup, till the time came that she, the ring-decked queen, excellent in mind, bore the mead-flagon to Beowulf. She greeted the prince of the Geats, thanked God with words of sober wisdom that her wish had been fulfilled, that she might trust to some earl as a comfort in trouble. He, the warrior fierce in fight, took that goblet from Wealtheow, and then, ready for battle, spoke in measures.

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "That was my purpose when I launched on the ocean, embarked on the sea-boat with the band of my warriors, that I should work the will of your people to the full, or fall a corpse fast in the foe's grip. I shall accomplish deeds of heroic might, or endure my last day in the mead-hall."

Those words, the boasting speech of the Geat, pleased the woman well. Decked with gold, the free-born queen of the people went to sit by her prince. Then again as before there was excellent converse in hall, the warriors in happiness, the sound of victorious people, till all at once Healfdene's son was minded to seek his evening's rest. He knew that war was destined to the high hall by the monster after they could no longer see the light of the sun, and when, night growing dark over all, the shadowy

creatures came stalking, black beneath the clouds.
The troop all rose.

Then one warrior greeted the other, Hrothgar Beowulf, and wished him success, power over the wine-hall, and spoke these words: "Never before did I trust to any men, since I was able to lift hand and shield, the excellent hall of the Danes, except to thee now. Have now and hold the best of houses. Be mindful of fame, show a mighty courage, watch against foes. Nor shalt thou lack what thou desirest, if with thy life thou comest out from that heroic task."

XI

THEN Hrothgar went his way with his band of heroes, the protector of Scyldings out of the hall; the warlike king was minded to seek Wealtheow the queen for his bedfellow. The glorious king had, as men learned, set a hall-guardian against Grendel; he performed a special service for the prince of the Danes, kept watch against monsters. Truly the prince of the Geats relied firmly on his fearless might, and the grace of the Lord. Then he laid aside his iron corslet, the helmet from his head, gave his ornamented sword, best of blades, to his servant and bade him keep his war-gear.

Then the valiant one, Beowulf of the Geats, spoke

some words of boasting ere he mounted his bed: "I do not count myself less in war-strength, in battle-deeds, than Grendel does himself; wherefore I will not slay him, spoil him of life by sword, although I might. He knows not the use of weapons so as to strike at me, hew my shield, though he may be mighty in works of malice; but we two shall do without swords in the night, if he dare to seek war without weapons, and afterwards the wise God, the holy Lord, shall award fame to whatever side seems good to Him." The bold warrior lay down, the earl's face touched the bolster; and round him many a mighty sea-hero bent to his couch in the hall. None of them thought that he should go thence and seek again the loved land, the people or stronghold where he was fostered; but they had heard that murderous death had ere now carried off far too many of Danish people in the wine-hall. But the Lord gave them success in war, support and succour to the men of the Weders, so that through the strength of one, his own might, they all overcame their foe. The truth has been made known, that mighty God has ever ruled over mankind.

The shadowy visitant came stalking in the dark night. The warriors slept, who were to keep the antlered building, all save one. That was known to men that the ghostly enemy might not sweep

The antlered building. The gables of the hall were adorned with antlers, from which it probably derived its name, Heorot, i.e. Hart.

them off among the shadows, for the Lord willed it not; but he, watching in anger against foes, awaited in wrathful mood the issue of the battle.

XII

THEN from the moor under the misty cliffs came Grendel, he bore God's anger. The foul foe purposed to trap with cunning one of the men in the high hall; he went under the clouds till he might see most clearly the wine-building, the gold-hall of warriors, gleaming with plates of gold. That was not the first time he had sought Hrothgar's home; never in his life-days before or since did he find bolder heroes and hall-thanes. The creature came, bereft of joys, making his way to the building. Straightway the door, firm clasped by fire-hardened fetters, opened, when he touched it with his hands; then, pondering evil, he tore open the entry of the hall when he was enraged. Quickly after that the fiend trod the gleaming floor, moved angry in mood. A baleful light, like flame, flared from his eyes. He saw in the building many heroes, the troop of kinsmen sleeping together, the band of young warriors. Then his mind exulted. The dread monster purposed ere day came to part the life of each one from the body, for the hope of a great feasting filled him. No longer did fate will that after that night he might seize

more of mankind. The kinsman of Hygelac, exceeding strong, beheld how the foul foe was minded to act with his sudden grips.

Nor did the monster think to delay, but first he quickly seized a sleeping warrior; suddenly tore him asunder, devoured his body, drank the blood from his veins, swallowed him with large bites. Straightway he had consumed all the body, even the feet and hands. He stepped forward nearer, laid hold with his hands of the resolute warrior on his couch; the fiend stretched his hand towards him. Beowulf met the attack quickly and sat on the arm. Forthwith the upholder of crime found that he had not met in the world, on the face of the earth among other men, a mightier hand-grip. Fear grew in his mind and heart; yet in spite of that he could not make off. He sought to move out; he was minded to flee to his refuge, to seek the troop of devils. His task there was not such as he had found in former days.

Then the brave kinsman of Hygelac remembered his speech in the evening; he stood upright and seized him firmly. The fingers burst, the monster was moving out; the earl stepped forward. The famous one purposed to flee further, if only he might, and win away thence to the fen strongholds; he knew the might of his fingers was in the grip of his foe. That was an ill journey that the ravager took to Heorot. The warrior's hall resounded. Terror fell on all the Danes, on the castle-dwellers, on each

of the bold men, on the earls. Wroth were they both, angry contestants for the house. The building rang aloud.

Then was it great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the bold fighters; that it fell not to the ground, the fair earth-dwelling; but it was so firmly braced within and without with iron bands of skilled workmanship. There many a mead-bench decked with gold bent away from the post, as I have heard, where the foemen fought. The wise men of the Scyldings looked not for that before, that any man could ever shatter it, rend it with malice in any way, excellent and bone-adorned as it was, unless the embrace of fire could swallow it in smoke. A sound arose, passing strange. Dread fear came upon each of the North-Danes who heard the cry from the wall, the lament of God's foe rise, the song of defeat; the hell-bound creature, crying out in his pain. He who was strongest in might among men at that time held him too closely.

XIII

THE protector of earls was minded in no wise to release the deadly visitant alive, nor did he count his life as useful to any men.

There most eagerly this one and that of Beowulf's men brandished the old swords, wished to save their

leader's life, the famous prince, if only they could. They did not know, when they were in the midst of the struggle, the stern warriors, and wished to strike on all sides, how to seek Grendel's life. No choicest of swords on the earth, no war-spear, would pierce the evil monster; but Beowulf had given up victorious weapons, all swords. His parting from life at that time was doomed to be wretched, and the alien spirit was to travel far into the power of the fiends.

Then he who erstwhile wrought much hurt to the mind of men and malice—he was hostile to God—found that his body would not follow him, for the brave kinsmen of Hygelac held him by the hand. Each was hateful to the other while he lived. The foul monster suffered pain in his body. A great wound was seen in his shoulder, the sinews sprang apart, the body burst open. Fame in war was granted to Beowulf. Grendel must needs flee thence under the fen-cliffs mortally wounded, seek out his joyless dwelling. He knew but too well the end of his life was come, the full count of his days. The desire of all the Danes was fulfilled after the storm of battle.

Then he who erstwhile came from afar, shrewd and staunch, had cleansed the hall of Hrothgar, freed it from battle. He rejoiced in the night-work, in heroic deeds. The prince of the Geat warriors had fulfilled his boast to the East-Danes; likewise he cured all their sorrows, sufferings from malicious foes, which they endured before and were forced to

bear in distress, no slight wrong. That was a clear token when the bold warrior laid down the hand, the arm and shoulder under the wide roof—it was all there together—the claw of Grendel.

XIV

THEN in the morning, as I have heard, around the gift-hall was many a warrior; leaders came from far and near throughout the wide ways to behold the wonder, the tracks of the monster. His going from life did not seem grievous to any man who saw the course of the inglorious one, how, weary in mind, beaten in battle, fated and fugitive, he left behind him on his way thence to the mere of the monster marks of his life-blood. Then the water was surging with blood, the foul welter of waves all mingled with hot gore; it boiled with the blood of battle. The death-doomed one dived in, then bereft of joy in his fen-refuge he laid down his life, his heathen soul, when hell received him. Thence again old comrades went, also many a young man, in merry companionship, the brave men riding on horses from the mere, warriors on bay steeds. There Beowulf's fame was proclaimed. Oftentimes many a one said that neither south nor north between the seas, over the wide earth, under the vault of the sky, was there any better among warriors, more worthy of a kingdom.

Nor in truth did they blame their friendly lord, gracious Hrothgar, for that was a good king.

At times the men doughty in battle let their sorrel horses run, race against one another, where the land-ways seemed fair to them, known for their good qualities; at times the king's thane, a man with many tales of exploits, mindful of measures, he who remembered a great number of the old legends, found other words which failed not in truth. The man began again wisely to frame Beowulf's exploit and skilfully to make deft measures, to deal in words. He spoke all that he had heard told of Sigemund's mighty deeds, much that was unknown, the warfare of the son of Wæls, the far journeys, the hostility and malice of which the children of men knew not at all, except Fitela who was with him when he was minded to say somewhat of such things, the uncle to his nephew; for they were always in every struggle bound together by kinship. They had felled with their swords very many of the race of giants. There sprang up for Sigemund after his death no little fame when the man bold in battle killed the dragon, the guardian of the treasure. Under the grey stone he ventured alone, the son of a chieftain, on the daring deed; Fitela was not with him. Yet it was granted to him that that sword pierced the monstrous dragon, so that it stood in the wall,

Sigemund's mighty deeds. Sigemund, son of Wæls and uncle of Fitela, to whom Beowulf is compared here, is a famous Scandinavian hero.

the noble blade. The dragon died violently. The hero had succeeded so well that he could use the treasure-heap of rings for his own glory. The son of Wæls loaded the sea-boat, bore to the ship's bosom the bright ornaments. The dragon melted in heat.

He was by far the most famous of adventurers among men, protector of warriors by mighty deeds; he prospered by that earlier, when the boldness, the strength and the courage of Heremod lessened. He was betrayed among the Eotens into the power of his enemies, quickly driven out. Surges of sorrow pressed him too long; he became a deadly grief to his people, to all his chieftains. So also many a wise man who trusted to him as a remedy for evils lamented in former times the valiant one's journey, that the prince's son was destined to prosper, inherit his father's rank, rule over the people, the treasure and the prince's fortress, the kingdom of heroes, the land of the Scyldings. There did he, the kinsman of Hygelac, become dearer to all men and to his friends than he. Treachery came upon him.

At times in rivalry they measured the yellow streets with their horses. Then the light of morning

The boldness . . . Heremod. Heremod, a Danish king, mentioned here and later in the poem as a type of cruel bad ruler—the very opposite of a hero like Beowulf.

Treachery came upon him. A difficult passage. Heremod, so unexpectedly introduced as a contrast to Sigemund, is apparently an old Danish king who, because of his cruelty and tyranny, is exiled by his people. He is referred to again in Section xxv.

had quickly mounted up. Many a retainer went bold-minded to the high hall to behold the battle-wonder; the king himself also, the keeper of ring-treasures, came glorious from his wife's chamber, famed for his virtues, with a great troop, and his queen with him measured the path to the mead-hall with a band of maidens.

XV

HROTHGAR spoke—he went to the hall, stood by the pillar, looked on the lofty gold-plated roof and Grendel's hand—"For this sight thanks be straight-way rendered to the Almighty. I suffered much that was hateful, sorrows at the hands of Grendel; ever may God, the glorious Protector, perform wonder after wonder.

"That was not long since when I looked not ever to find solace for any of my woes, when the best of houses stood blood-stained, gory from battle; woe wide-spread among all councillors who had no hope of ever protecting the fortress of warriors against foes, against demons and evil spirits. Now the warrior has performed the deed through the Lord's might which formerly all of us could not contrive with our cunning. Lo! a woman who has borne such a son among the peoples, if she yet lives, may say that the ancient Lord was gracious to her in

the birth of her son. Now I will love thee in my heart as my son, Beowulf, best of men; keep well the new kinship. Thou shalt lack none of the things thou desirest in the world, which I can command. Full often have I for less cause bestowed reward on a slighter warrior, a weaker in combat, to honour him with treasures. Thou hast brought it to pass for thyself by deeds that thy glory shall live forever. The All-Ruler reward thee with good things as He has done till now."

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "We accomplished that heroic deed, that battle, through great favour. We risked ourselves boldly against the might of the monster. I had rather that thou couldst have seen him, the fiend in his trappings, weary unto death. I thought to bind him speedily with strong clasps on his death-bed, so that he must needs lie in his death-agony by my hand-grip, unless his body should slip away. I could not, since the Lord willed it not, prevent his passing out. I did not hold him closely enough, the deadly enemy; the foe was too mighty in going. Nevertheless he left his hand, arm and shoulder, to serve as a token of his flight. Yet the wretched creature won no solace there; no longer lives the malicious foe pressed by sins, but pain has embraced him closely with hostile grasp, with ruinous bonds. There the creature stained with sin must needs await the great doom, what judgment the bright Lord will award him."

Then the son of Ecglaf was a more silent man in

boasting of war deeds, when the chieftains beheld by the strength of the earl the hand, the fingers of the monster, stretching up to the high roof; each at its tip, each place where the nails were, was like steel, the heathen's claw, the monstrous spike of the fighter. Everyone said that no well-tried sword of brave man would wound him, would shorten the monster's bloody battle-fist.

XVI

THEN it was quickly commanded that Heorot should be decked within with the claws. There were many there, men and women, who made ready the wine-building, the guest-hall. Woven hangings gleamed, gold-adorned, on the walls, many wondrous sights for all men who look on such things. That bright building was all sorely shattered, though firm within with its iron clasps; its door-hinges burst. The roof alone survived all scatheless, when the monster stained with evil deeds turned in flight, despairing of life. That is not easy to avoid—let him do it who will—but he must needs strive against the place forced on him by necessity, prepared for all who bear souls, for the children of men, for the dwellers on earth, where his body sleeps after the banquet fast in its narrow bed.

That is not easy to avoid. That is, death comes to all men.

Then was the time convenient and fitting that Healfdene's son should go to the hall; the king himself wished to join in the banquet. I have not heard of a people who showed a nobler bearing with a greater troop about their giver of treasure. The famous ones then sat down on the bench, rejoiced in the feast; in seemly fashion they took many a mead-goblet; brave-minded kinsmen were in the high hall, Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Heorot within was filled with friends. Not yet at this time had the Scyldings practised treachery.

The son of Healfdene gave then to Beowulf a golden ensign as a reward for victory, an ornamented banner with a handle, a helmet and corslet, a famous precious sword. Many saw them borne before the warrior. Beowulf took the goblet in hall; he needed not to be ashamed in front of the warriors of the bestowing of gifts.

I have not heard of many men giving to others on the ale-bench in more friendly fashion four treasures decked with gold. Around the top of the helmet a jutting ridge twisted with wires held guard over the head, so that many an old sword, proved hard in battle, could not injure the bold man, when the shield-bearing warrior was destined to go against foes. Then the protector of earls commanded eight horses with gold-plated bridles to be led into the

Not yet . . . treachery. Wealtheow hopes that her nephew Hrothulf will protect her sons if he survives Hrothgar. We know from Scandinavian books that Hrothulf turned traitor, killed Hrethric, and was finally slain by Heorowearð.

hall, into the house; on one of them lay a saddle artfully adorned with gold, decked with costly ornament. That was the war-seat of the noble king, when the son of Healfdene was minded to practise sword-play. Never did the bravery of the far-famed man fail in the van when corpses were falling. Then the protector of the friends of Ing gave power over both to Beowulf, over horses and weapons; he bade him use them well. Thus manfully did the famous prince, the treasure-keeper of heroes, reward the rushes of battle with steeds and rich stores, so that he who wishes to speak truth in seemly fashion will never scoff at them.

XVII

FURTHER the lord of earls bestowed treasure on the mead-bench, ancient blades to each of those who travelled the ocean path with Beowulf; and he bade recompense to be made with gold for the one whom Grendel before murderously killed. So he was minded to do with more of them, if wise God and the man's courage had not turned aside such a fate from them. The Lord ruled over all mankind as He still does. Wherefore understanding, forethought of soul, is everywhere best. He who sojourns long in the world

The friends of Ing. The Danes are called the friends of Ing, the first King of the East-Danes.

in these days of sorrow must needs suffer much of weal and woe.

There was song and music mingled before Healfdene's chieftain; the harp was touched; a measure often recited at such times as it fell to Hrothgar's minstrel to proclaim joy in hall along the mead-bench. Hnæf of the Scyldings, a hero of the Half-Danes, was fated to fall in the Frisian battle-field when the sudden onslaught came upon them, the sons of Finn. "Nor in truth had Hildeburh cause to praise the faith of the Eotens; sinless, she was spoiled of her dear ones at the shield-play, a son and a brother; wounded with the spear, they fell in succession. She was a sorrowing woman. Not without cause did the daughter of Hoc lament her fate, when morning came when she might see the slaughter of kinsmen under the sky, where erstwhile she possessed greatest joy in the world. War

Hnæf. Finn, King of the North Frisians (Eotens) carries off Hildeburh of the Danes. Her son and brother (Hnæf) are slain in an attack on the Frisians at Finnsburg. Finn and Hengest, who now commands the Danes, agree to a peace. Frisians and Danes are to live peacefully together; old feuds are not to be recalled. The funeral rites of the slain are held. The winter passes: Hengest still lingers at Finnsburg. More Danes arrive, led by Guthlaf and Oslaf. The peace is broken, Finn slain and Hildeburh carried back to her people.

The sons of Finn. There was an Old English poem about Finn, but only a few lines have been preserved. From this fragment and from the passage in *Beowulf* it is not easy to make out all the details of the story. Finn is king of the Frisians. He quarrels with Hnæf (the son of Hoc), the brother of his wife Hildeburh. Hnæf, who is a Dane or partly Danish, is killed, but finally his death is revenged upon Finn.

carried off all the thanes of Finn except a very few, so that in no wise could he offer fight to Hengest in the battle-field, nor protect by war the sad survivors from the prince's thane; but they offered him conditions, that they would give up to them entirely another building, the hall and high seat; that they might have power over half of it with the men of the Eotens, and that the son of Folcwalda would honour the Danes each day with gifts at the bestowal of presents, would pay respect to Hengest's troop with rings, just as much as he would encourage the race of the Frisians in the beer-hall with ornaments of plated gold. Then on both sides they had faith in firm-knit peace. Finn swore to Hengest deeply, inviolably with oaths, that he would treat the sad survivors honourably according to the judgment of the councillors, on condition that no man there should break the bond by word or deed, nor should they ever mention it in malice, although they had followed the slayer of their giver of rings after they had lost their leader, since the necessity was laid upon them; if then any one of the Frisians should recall to mind by dangerous speech the deadly hostility, then it must needs recall also the edge of the sword.

"The oath was sworn and rich gold taken from the treasure. The best of the heroes of the warlike Scyldings was ready on the funeral fire. On that pyre the blood-stained shirt of mail was plain to see, the swine-image all gold, the boar hard as iron, many a chieftain slain with wounds. Many had fallen in

the fight. Then Hildeburh bade her own son to be given over to the flames at Hnæf's pyre, his body to be burned and placed on the funeral fire. The woman wept, sorrowing by his side; she lamented in measures. The warrior mounted up. The greatest of funeral fires wound up to the clouds, it roared in front of the mound. Heads melted, wounds burst open, deadly bites in the body; then the blood gushed forth. The fire, greediest of spirits, consumed all those of both peoples whom war carried off there. Their mightiest men had departed."

XVIII

"THE warriors went then, bereft of friends, to visit the dwellings, to see the land of the Frisians, the homes and the stronghold. Then Hengest dwelt yet in peace with Finn for a winter stained with the blood of the slain; he thought of his land though he could not drive the ring-prowed ship on the sea (the ocean surged with storm, rose up against the wind; winter bound the waves with fetters of ice), till another year came into the dwellings; as those still do now who ever await an opportunity, the bright clear weather. Then winter was past; the bosom of the earth was fair; the exile purposed to depart, the guest out of the castle; he thought rather of vengeance for sorrow than of the sea journey, if he could bring the battle

to pass in which he thought to take vengeance on the children of the Eotens; as long as he broke not his oaths. Then Hunlafing laid in his bosom the gleaming sword, best of blades. Its edges were famed among the Eotens. Even so did dread sword-evil come upon brave Finn in his own home. Afterwards Guthlaf and Oslaf made known the grim attack, the sorrow after their sea journey; they were wroth at their share of woes; their restless spirit could not be ruled in their breast. Then was the hall covered with corpses of foes, Finn slain likewise, the king mid his troop, and the queen taken. The warriors of the Scyldings bore to the ships all the house-treasure of the king of the land, whatever they could find at Finn's home of ornaments and jewels. They bore away on the sea voyage the noble woman to the Danes, led her to her people."

The song was sung, the glee-man's measure. Joy rose again, bench-music rang out clear, servants gave out wine from wondrous goblets. Then Wealtheow, under her golden circlet, came forth where the two valiant ones were sitting, uncle and nephew. At

Then Hunlafing, etc. The meaning of this sentence is very obscure. Several interpretations are possible—Hunlafing, a servant of Finn, brings a sword as a goodwill offering to Hengest; or, Hunlafing plunged into Hengest's breast the gleaming sword; or, *Hun* may be the man's name, and *Lafing* the name of the sword.

Led her to her people. The story of Finn formed the subject of an independent poem in Old English. A fragment remains, and apparently deals with the first or second of the battles between the Danes and Frisians.

that time there was peace yet between them, each true to the other. Likewise Unferth sat there as a squire at the feet of the prince of the Scyldings. Each of them trusted his heart, that he had a noble mind, though he had not been faithful to his kinsmen at the play of swords. Then spoke the queen of the Scyldings: "Receive this goblet, my prince, giver of treasure. Mayest thou prosper, gold-friend of warriors, and speak to the Geats with kindly words, as it is fitting to do. Be gracious to the Geats, mindful of gifts; far and near now thou hast peace. They said that thou wast minded to take the warrior for son. Heorot is cleansed, the bright ring-hall; be generous with many rewards while thou mayst, and leave to thy kinsmen subjects and kingdom, when thou must needs go forth to face thy destiny. I know my gracious Hrothulf, that he will treat the young men honourably, if thou, friend of the Scyldings, pass from the world before him. I think that he will richly reward our children, if he forgets not all the favours we formerly showed him for his pleasure and honour, while he was still a child."

She turned then towards the bench where her sons were, Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the sons of heroes, the young men together; there the valiant one, Beowulf of the Geats, sat by the two brothers.

XIX

To him was the flagon borne and a friendly invitation offered with words and the twisted gold vessel graciously presented; two bracelets, a corslet and rings, greatest of necklaces, of those which I have heard of on earth.

I have not heard of a better treasure-hoard of heroes under the sky since Hama carried off to the gleaming castle the necklace of the Brosings, the trinket and treasure; he fled the malicious hostility of Eormenric; he chose everlasting gain. Hygelac of the Geats, grandson of Swerting, had the ring on his last expedition, when beneath his banner he defended the treasure, guarded the booty of battle. Fate took him off, when in his pride he suffered misfortune in fight against the Frisians; the mighty prince bore the ornament, the precious stones over the wave-goblet; he fell under his shield. Then the king's body passed into the power of the Franks, his breast-garments and the ring also; less noble warriors stripped the bodies of the men of the Geats after the carnage of war; their bodies

Since Hama carried off, etc. Eormenric or Ermanaric is an historical king who died about 375 A.D. He became a famous figure in romance and legend. The necklace of the Brisings is celebrated in Scandinavian literature. Hama, like Eormenric, appears in many books, but may not be historical.

covered the battle-field. . . . The hall rang with shouts of approval.

Wealtheow spoke, she uttered words before the troop: "Enjoy this ring happily, dear young Beowulf; and use this corslet, the great treasures and prosper exceedingly; make thyself known mightily, and be to these youths kindly in counsel. I will not forget thy reward for that. Thou hast brought it about that far and near men ever praise thee, even as far as the sea hems in the home of the winds, the headlands. Blessed be thou while thou livest, nobly-born man. I will grant thee many treasures. Be thou gracious in deeds to my son, thou who art now in happiness. Here each earl is true to the other, gentle in mind, loyal to the lord. The thanes are willing, the people all ready, noble warriors after drinking. Do as I bid."

She went then to the seat. There was the choicest of banquets; the men drank wine; they knew not fate, dread destiny, as it had been dealt out to many of the earls. Afterwards came evening, and Hrothgar

Covered the battlefield. Hygelac's expedition against the Frisians, here referred to, belongs to authentic history. Gregory of Tours (*d.* 594) tells how the Danes under their king Chlochilaicus invaded the kingdom and carried many captives and much plunder to their ships. Chlochilaicus, delaying on shore, was killed by the Franks, who defeated the Danes in a naval battle and recovered the booty. Chlochilaicus of the Danes is the same person as Hygelac of the Geats. These events took place between 512 and 520. There are three other references in Beowulf to the expedition—Sections xxxiii., xxxv., and xl.

went to his chamber, the mighty one to his couch. A great band of earls occupied the hall, as they often did before; they cleared away bench-boards; it was spread over with beds and bolsters. One of the revellers, ready and fated, sank to his couch in the hall. At their heads they placed the war-shields, the bright bucklers. There on the bench was plainly seen above the chieftains the helmet rising high in battle, the ringed corslet, the mighty spear. It was their custom that often both at home and in the field, they should be ready for war, and equally in both positions at all such times as distress came upon their lord. Those people were good.

XX

THEY sank then to sleep. One sorely paid for his evening rest, as had full often come to pass for them, when Grendel held the gold-hall, and did wickedness until the end came, death after sins. That was seen, widely known among men, that an avenger, Grendel's mother, a she-monster, yet survived the hateful one, a long while after the misery of war. She who was doomed to dwell in the dread water, the cold streams, after Cain killed his only brother, his father's son, forgot not her misery. He departed then fated, marked with murder, to flee from the joys of men; he dwelt in the wilderness. Thence sprang many

ancient spirits; Grendel was one of them, warring and hated; he found at Heorot a man keeping watch, waiting for war. There the monster came to grips with him: yet he remembered the power of his strength, the precious gift which God gave him, and he trusted for support, for succour and help, to Him who rules over all. By that he overcame the fiend, laid low the spirit of hell. Then he departed, the foe of mankind, in misery, reft of joy, to seek his death-dwelling. And his mother then still purposed to go on the sorrowful journey, greedy and darkly-minded, to avenge her son's death.

She came then to Heorot where the Ring-Danes slept throughout that hall. Then straightway the old fear fell on the earls, when Grendel's mother forced her way in. The dread was less by just so much as the strength of women, the war-terror of a woman, is less than a man, when the bound sword shaped by the hammer, the blood-stained blade strong in its edges, cuts off the boar-image on the foeman's helmet. Then in the hall was the strong blade drawn, the sword over the seats; many a broad buckler raised firmly in hand. He thought not of helmet nor of broad corslet, when the terror seized him.

She was in haste, was minded to go thence and save her life when she was discovered. Quickly she had seized one of the chieftains with firm grip; then she went to the fen. That was the dearest of heroes to Hrothgar among his followers between the seas, a

mighty shield-warrior, whom she slew on his couch, a noble man of great fame. Beowulf was not there, but another lodging had been set apart for him earlier, after the giving of treasure to the famous Geat. There was clamour in Heorot. She had carried off the famous blood-stained hand. Care was created anew; it had come into the dwellings. That was no good bargain which they had to pay for in double measure with lives of friends. Then the wise king, the grey battle-warrior, was troubled in heart, when he knew that the noble thane was lifeless, that the dearest one was dead.

Beowulf was quickly brought to the castle, the victorious warrior. At dawn that earl, the noble hero himself with his comrades, went to where the wise man (Hrothgar) was waiting to see whether the All-ruler would ever bring to pass a change after the time of woe. Then the man famous in fight went with his nearest followers along the floor—(the hall-wood resounded)—till he greeted the wise one with words, the prince of the friends of Ing; he asked if, as he hoped, he had had a peaceful night.

XXI

HROTHGAR spoke, protector of the Scyldings: "Ask thou not after happiness. Sorrow is made anew for the Danish people. Æschere is dead, Yrmenlaf's elder brother, my counsellor and my adviser, trusted

friend, in such times as we fended our heads in war, when the foot-warriors crashed together and hewed the helms. Such should an earl be, a trusty chieftain, as *Æschere* was.

“That unjust slaughterous spirit slew him with her hands in *Heorot*. I know not whether the monster, made known by her feasting, journeyed back exulting in the corpse. She avenged the fight in which last night thou didst violently kill *Grendel* with hard grips because too long he lessened and slew my people. He fell in combat, guilty of murder, and now another mighty evil foe has come; she was minded to make requital for her son, and she has overmuch avenged the hostile deed, as it may seem to many a thane who grieves in mind for the giver of treasure with heavy heart-sorrow. Now low lies the hand which was ready for all your desires.

“I heard dwellers in the land, my people, counsellors in hall, say that they saw two such great march-steppers, alien spirits, hold the moors. One of them was, as far they could certainly know, the likeness of a woman; the other wretched creature trod the paths of exile in man’s shape, except that he was greater than any other man. Him in days past the dwellers in the land named *Grendel*; his father they know not; nor whether there were born to him earlier any dark spirits.

“They possess unknown land, wolf-cliffs, windy crags, a dangerous fen-path, where the mountain stream falls down under the darkness of the rocks,

a flood under the earth. That is not a mile hence where the mere stands; over it hang rime-covered groves; the wood firm-rooted overshadows the water. There each night a baleful wonder may be seen, a fire on the flood. There is none so wise of the children of men who knows those depths. Though the heath-stepper hard pressed by the hounds, the hart strong in antlers, should seek the forest after a long chase, rather does he yield up his life, his spirit on the shore than hide his head there. That is an eerie place. Thence the surge of waves mounts up dark to the clouds, when the wind stirs up hostile storms till the air darkens, the skies weep.

"Now once more help must come from thee alone. Thou dost not yet know the lair, the dangerous place where thou mayest find the sinful creature; seek if thou darest. If thou comest away alive, I will reward thee for that onslaught, as erstwhile I did, with treasures, old precious things, twisted gold."

XXII

BEOWULF spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "Sorrow not, wise warrior. It is better for each to avenge his friend than greatly to mourn. Each of us must needs await the end of life in the world; let him who can achieve fame ere death. That is best for a noble warrior when life is over. Rise up, guardian of the

realm; let us go quickly hence to behold the track of Grendel's kinswoman. I promise thee she shall not escape under covering darkness, nor in the earth's embrace, nor in the mountain forest, nor in the water's depths—go where she will. Have thou, as I expect from thee, patience for all thy woes this day.”

The aged one leaped up then; thanked God, the mighty Lord, for what the man spoke. Then Hrothgar's horse was bitted, the steed with twisted mane. The wise prince went forth in splendour; the foot-troop of shield-bearing warriors stepped forward. The tracks were widely seen along the forest paths, the course over the fields. Away over the dark moor she went; she bore the best of thanes, reft of life, who with Hrothgar ruled the land. Then the son of princes strode over the high rocky cliffs, the narrow paths, the straitened tracks, the unknown road, the steep crags, many a monster's abode. He with a few other wise men went ahead to spy out the land, until suddenly he found the mountain trees hanging above the grey rock. The water beneath lay blood-stained and troubled. All the Danes, the friends of the Scyldings, were mournful in mood; many athane had to suffer; there was sorrow for many of the earls, when they found Æschere's head on the cliff by the mere.

The flood surged with blood, with hot gore; the people beheld it. At times the horn sang its eager war-song. The troop all sat down; then they saw along the water many of the dragon kind, strange

sea-dragons moving over the mere, also monsters lying on the rocky headlands; then at midday the dragons and wild beasts often go on a sorrowful journey on the sail-road. They fell away bitter and angered; they heard the clang, the war-horn sounding. The prince of the Geats with his bow parted one of them from life, from the struggle of the waves, so that the stout war-shaft stood in his heart. He was the more sluggish at swimming in the water, because death carried him off. Speedily the wondrous wave-dweller was hard pressed in the waves with boar-spears of deadly barbs, beset by hostile attacks and drawn out on the headland. The men beheld the dread creature.

Beowulf clad himself in warrior's armour; he lamented not his life. The war-corslet, hand-woven, broad, cunningly adorned, must needs try the water; it knew how to guard his body so that the grip of war might not wound his heart, the malicious clutch of an angry foe his life. And the gleaming helmet, which was to mingle with the depths of the mere, to seek the welter of the waves, decked with treasure, circled with diadems, as the smith of weapons wrought it in days long past, wondrously adorned it, set it round with boar-images; it guarded his head so that no sword or battle-blades could pierce it. That was not the least then of mighty helps that Hrothgar's squire lent him in his need. That hilted sword was called Hrunting; it was an excellent old treasure the brand was iron, stained with poisonous twigs,

hardened in the blood of battle. It never failed any men in war who seized it with their hands, who ventured to go on dire journeys, to the meeting-place of foes. That was not the first time that it was to accomplish a mighty deed.

In truth the son of Ecglaf mighty in strength did not remember what erstwhile he spoke when drunken with wine, when he lent the weapon to a better sword-warrior. He himself durst not risk his life beneath the tossing of the waves, accomplish heroic deeds. There he forfeited fame, repute for might. Not so was it with the other when he had clad himself for war.

XXIII

BEOWULF spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "Consider now, famous son of Healfdene, wise prince, gold-friend of warriors, now I am ready for the venture, what we spoke of a while since; if I should depart from life in thy cause, that thou shouldst ever be in the place of a father when I am gone. Be thou a guardian to my followers, my comrades, if war takes me. Likewise, dear Hrothgar, do thou send the treasures thou hast given me to Hygelac. The lord of the Geats may perceive by that gold, the son of Hrethel may see when he looks upon that treasure, that I found an excellent good giver of rings, that I took joy

while I could. And do thou let Unferth have the ancient blade, the far-famed man have the precious sword with wavy pattern and sharp edge; I shall achieve fame for myself with Hrunting, or death will carry me off."

After those words the prince of the Weder-Geats hastened exceedingly; he would in no wise wait for an answer. The surge of waters received the war-hero. Then there was a spell of time ere he might behold the bottom of the mere.

She who had held for fifty years the domain of the floods, eager for battle, grim and greedy, discovered straightway that a man was seeking from above the dwelling of monsters. She reached out against him then, seized the warrior with dread claws; nevertheless she injured not the sound body; the ring-mail guarded it round about so that she could not pierce the corslet, the locked mail-shirt, with hostile fingers. When she came to the bottom, the sea-wolf bore the prince of rings to her lair. Since he could not use weapons—he burned to do so—many monsters set upon him in the water, many a sea-beast rent his war-corslet with battle-tusks; they pursued the hero. Then the earl noticed he was in some kind of hostile hall, where no water in any way touched him, nor could the sudden clutch of the flood come near him because of the roofed hall; he saw the light of fire, a gleaming radiance shining brightly.

Then the valiant one perceived the she-wolf of the depths, the mighty mere-woman; he repaid the

mighty rush with the battle-sword; the hand drew not back from the stroke, so that the sword, adorned with rings, sang a greedy war-chant on her head. Then the stranger found that the sword would not bite or injure life, but the edge failed the prince in his need. It had endured in times past many battles, often had cut through the helmet, the mail of a doomed man. That was the first time for the costly treasure that its repute failed.

Once again the kinsman of Hygelac was resolute, mindful of heroic deeds, no whit lax in courage. Then the angry warrior cast down the sword with its twisted ornaments, set round with decorations, so that it lay on the ground, strong and steel-edged. He trusted in his strength, his mighty hand-grip. Thus a man must needs do when he is minded to gain lasting praise in war, nor cares for his life.

Then the prince of the War-Geats seized Grendel's mother by the hair; he feared not the fight. Then stern in strife he swung the monster in his wrath so that she bent to the ground. She quickly gave him requital again with savage grips, and grasped out towards him. Weary in mood then she overthrew the strongest of fighters, the foot-warrior, so that he fell down. Then she sat on the visitor to her hall, and drew her knife, broad and bright-edged; she was minded to avenge her child, her only son. The woven breast-net lay on his shoulder; that guarded his life; it opposed the entrance of point and edge. Then the son of Ecgtheow, the hero of the Geats, would have

found death under the wide waters if the war-corslet, the stout battle-net, had not afforded him help, and if holy God, the wise Lord, had not achieved victory in war; the Ruler of the heavens brought about a right issue, when once more he stood up with ease.

XXIV

HE saw then among weapons a victorious blade, an old sword of giants, strong in its edges, the glory of warriors. That was the choicest of weapons; save only it was greater than any other man could bear to the battle-play, trusty and splendid, the work of giants. The hero of the Scyldings, angered and grim in battle, seized the belted hilt, wheeled the ring-marked sword, despairing of life; he struck furiously, so that it gripped her hard against the neck. It broke the bone-rings; the blade went straight through the doomed body. She fell on the floor. The brand was bloody; the man rejoiced in his work.

The gleam was bright, the light stood within, just as the candle of the sky shines serenely from heaven. He went along the dwelling; then he turned to the wall; Hygelac's thane, raging and resolute, raised the weapon firmly by its hilts. The sword was not useless to the warrior, but he was minded quickly to requite Grendel for the many onslaughts which far

more than once he made on the West-Danes, when he slew Hrothgar's hearth-companions in their sleep, devoured fifteen men of the Danish people while they slumbered, and bore away as many more, a hateful sacrifice. He, the furious hero, avenged that upon him there where he saw Grendel lying, weary of war, reft of life, as erstwhile the battle at Heorot despatched him. The body gaped wide, when after death it suffered a stroke, a hard battle-blow: and then he hewed off its head.

Straightway the wise men who gazed on the mere with Hrothgar saw that the surge of waves was all troubled, the water stained with blood. Grey-haired old men spoke together of the valiant man, that they did not expect to see the chieftain again, or that he should come as a conqueror to seek the famous prince. Then it seemed to many that the sea-wolf had slain him. Then came the ninth hour of the day. The bold Scyldings forsook the headland; thence the gold-friend of men departed homewards. The strangers sat sick at heart, and stared at the mere; they felt desire and despair of seeing their friendly lord himself.

Then that sword, the battle-brand, began to vanish in drops of gore after the blood shed in fight. That was a great wonder, that it all melted like ice when the Father loosens the bond of the frost, unbinds the fetters of the floods; He has power over times and seasons. That is the true Lord.

The prince of the Weder-Geats took no more of the

precious hoardings in those haunts, though he saw many there, save the head and with it the treasure-decked hilts. The sword had melted before, the inlaid brand had burned away, so hot was that blood and so poisonous the alien spirit who died in it. Straightway he fell to swimming; he, who before in the struggle endured the fall of foes, dived up through the water. The wave surges were all cleansed, the great haunts where the alien spirit gave up his life and this fleeting state.

Then the protector of sea-men, brave-minded, came swimming to land; he took pleasure in the sea-booty, in the mighty burden which he bore with him. They went to meet him, the excellent troop of thanes; they thanked God; they rejoiced in the prince, that they could behold him safe and sound. Then helm and corslet were loosed with speed from off the brave men; the lake lay still, the water under the clouds, stained with the blood of battle.

They set out thence on the foot-tracks, joyous at heart; they paced the path, the well-known street, Men nobly bold bore the head from the cliff with toil for each of the very brave ones. Four men with difficulty had to carry Grendel's head to the gold-hall on the battle-spear, until of a sudden the fourteen brave warlike Geats came to the hall; their lord trod the fields about the mead-hall with them, fearless among his followers.

Then the prince of thanes, the man bold in deeds, made glorious with fame, the hero terrible in battle,

came in to greet Hrothgar. Then Grendel's head was borne by the hair into the hall where the men were drinking—a dread object for the earls and the queen with them; the men looked at the wondrous sight.

XXV

BEOWULF spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "Lo! son of Healfdene, prince of the Scyldings, we have brought thee with pleasure, as a token of glory, this sea-booty which thou beholdest here. Scarcely did I survive that with my life, the struggle beneath the water, barely did I accomplish the task, the fight was all but ended, if God had not protected me.

"I could do nought with Hrunting in the fight, though that weapon is worthy, but the Ruler of men vouchsafed that I should see a huge old sword hang gleaming on the wall—most often he has guided those bereft of friends—so that I swung the weapon. Then in the struggle I slew the guardians of the house when the chance was given me. Then that battle-brand, the inlaid sword, burned away as soon as the blood spurted out, hottest battle-gore. Thence from the foes I carried off that hilt; I avenged, as was fitting, the deeds of malice, the massacre of the Danes.

"So I promise thee that thou mayest sleep in Heorot, free from sorrow with the band of thy warriors and all the thanes among thy people, the

youths and veterans; that thou, prince of the Scyldings, dost not need to dread death for the earls from the quarter thou didst formerly."

Then the gold hilt, the ancient work of giants, was given into the hands of the old warrior, to the grey-haired leader. It came into the possession of the prince of the Danes, the work of cunning smiths, after the death of the monsters, and after the creature of hostile heart. God's foe, guilty of murder, and his mother also had left this world. It came into the power of the best of mighty kings between the seas who dealt out money in Scandinavia.

Hrothgar spoke; he beheld the hilt, the old heirloom. On it was written the beginning of a battle of long ago, when a flood, a rushing sea, slew the race of giants; they had lived boldly; that race was estranged from the Eternal Lord. The Ruler gave them final requital for that in the surge of the water. Thus on the plates of bright gold it was clearly marked, set down and expressed in runic letters, for whom that sword, the best of blades, was first wrought with its twisted haft and snake images.

Then the wise man spoke, the son of Healfdene. All were silent. "Lo! he who achieves truth and right among the people may say that this earl was born excellent (the old ruler of the realm recalls all things from the past). Thy renown is raised up throughout the wide ways, my friend Beowulf, among all peoples. Thou preservest all steadfastly, thy might with wisdom of mind. I shall show thee my

favour, as before we agreed. Thou shalt be granted for long years as a solace to thy people, as a help to heroes.

“Not so did Heremod prove to the sons of Ecgwela, the honourable Scyldings; his way was not as they wished, but to the slaughter and butchery of the people of the Danes. Savage in mood he killed his table-companions, his trusty counsellors, until he, the famous prince, departed alone from the joys of men, although mighty God had made him great by the joys of power and by strength, had raised him above all men. Yet there grew in his heart a blood-thirsty brood of thoughts. He gave out no rings to the Danes according to custom; joyless he dwelt, so that he reaped the reward of his hostility, the long evil to his people. Learn thou by this; lay hold on virtue. I have spoken this for thy good from the wisdom of many years.

“It is wonderful to tell how mighty God with his generous thought bestows on mankind wisdom, land and rank. He has dominion over all things. At times He allows man’s thoughts to turn to love of famous lineage; He gives him in his land the joys of domain, the stronghold of men to keep. He puts the parts of the world, a wide kingdom, in such subjection to him that he cannot in his folly conceive an end to that. He lives in plenty; nothing afflicts him, neither sickness nor age; nor does sorrow darken his mind, nor does strife anywhere show forth sword-hatred, but all the world meets his desire.”

XXVI

“HE knows nothing worse till within him his pride grows and springs up. Then the guardian slumbers, the keeper of the soul. The sleep is too heavy, pressed round with sorrows; the murderer very near who shoots maliciously from his bow. Then he is stricken in the breast under the helmet by a sharp shaft—he knows not how to guard himself—by the crafty evil commands of the ill spirit. That which he had long held seems to him too paltry, he covets fiercely, he bestows no golden rings in generous pride, and he forgets and neglects the destiny which God, the Ruler of glory, formerly gave him, his share of honours. At the end it comes to pass that the mortal body sinks into ruin, falls doomed; another comes to power who bestows treasures gladly, old wealth of the earl; he takes joy in it. Keep thyself from such passions, dear Beowulf, best of warriors, and choose for thyself that better part, lasting profit. Care not for pride, famous hero. Now the repute of thy might endures for a space; straightway again shall age, or edge of the sword, part thee from thy strength, or the embrace of fire, or the surge of the flood, or the grip of the blade, or the flight of the spear, or hateful old age, or the gleam of eyes shall pass away and be darkened; on a sudden it shall come to pass that death shall vanquish thee, noble warrior.

“Thus have I ruled over the Ring-Danes under the

heavens for fifty years, and guarded them by my war-power from many tribes throughout this world, from spears and swords, so that I thought I had no foe under the stretch of the sky. Lo! a reverse came upon me in my land, sorrow after joy, when Grendel grew to be a foe of many years, my visitant. I suffered great sorrow of heart continually from that persecution. Thanks be to God, the eternal Lord, that I have survived with my life, that I behold with my eyes that blood-stained head after the old struggle. Go now to the seat, enjoy the banquet, thou who art made illustrious by war; very many treasures shall be parted between us when morning comes."

The Geat was glad in mind; straightway he went to seek out his seat as the wise man bade him. Then again as before the meal was fairly spread once more for the men famed for strength, for the hall-dwellers. The covering night grew dark over the noble warriors. The veterans all rose up; the grey-haired aged Scylding was minded to seek his bed. It pleased the Geat, the mighty shield-warrior exceeding well to rest. Forthwith a hall-thane, who ministered in fitting fashion to all the needs of a thane which the warlike sea-farers should have that day, guided him forth, weary as he was from his journey, come from afar. The great-hearted man took his rest: the building towered up wide-gabled and gold-plated; the guest slumbered within till the black raven merrily proclaimed the joy of heaven.

Then came the bright light gliding after the shadow. The warriors hastened, the chieftains were ready to go again to their people, the stout-hearted sojourner was minded to seek the boat far thence. Then the brave man, the son of Ecglaf, bade him bear Hrunting, take his sword, his dear blade; he thanked him for the gift; said that he counted him a good friend in battle, mighty in war; in no wise did he belittle the sword's edge: that was a brave warrior. And the men of war then, ready in war-trappings, were about to depart; the chieftain, dear to the Danes, went to the throne where the other was, the hero dreaded in battle; he greeted Hrothgar.

XXVII

BEOWULF spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "Now we seafarers, come from afar, wish to say that we purpose to seek Hygelac. We have been as kindly treated here as we could wish; thou hast been good unto us. If I can in any way on earth win a greater love from thee, lord of men, for warlike deeds than I have yet done, I am ready forthwith. If beyond the compass of the floods I hear that thy neighbours press upon thee with dread war, as at times foes have done to thee, I shall bring to thy help a thousand thanes and heroes. I know that Hygelac, the lord of the Geats, protector of the people, though he is

young, will aid me in words and deeds to support thee well and bear a spear to thy aid, mighty succour, if thou hast need of men. If Hrethric, a prince's son, make an agreement at the court of the Geats, he may find many friends there. For him who trusts his own merit it is better to visit distant lands."

Hrothgar spoke to him in answer: "The wise Lord has sent those speeches into thy mind. I have not heard a man of such young age discourse more wisely. Thou art strong in might and wise in mind, prudent in speeches. It is my expectation, if it comes to pass that the spear, grim war, sickness, or steel should carry off the son of Hrethel, thy prince, the protector of the people, and thou art still alive, that the Sea-Geats will have no better king to choose, treasure-guardian of heroes, if thou wilt rule the kingdom of thy kinsmen. Thy mind pleases me the better as time goes on, dear Beowulf. Thou hast brought it to pass that there shall be peace between the peoples, the men of the Geats and the Spear-Danes, and that strife shall cease, the treacherous hostility they formerly suffered; while I rule over the wide realm treasures shall be in common; many a man shall greet another with gifts across the gannet's bath; the ring-prowed ship shall bear offerings and love-tokens over the sea. I know the people from old tradition to be wholly blameless towards friend and foe when they are of one mind."

Then moreover the protector of earls, the son of Healfdene, gave in the house twelve treasures; he

bade him seek his dear people in safety with those offerings, come again speedily. Then the king of noble race, the prince of the Scyldings, kissed the best of thanes, and fell upon his neck: tears fell from him, the grey-haired man. There was the chance of two things for him, the old man full of years, but more of one, that they should not see one another again, brave men in talk together. That man was so dear to him, that he could not stifle the trouble in his heart, but, fast bound in the thoughts of his heart, the secret longing for the loved man burned in his blood. Thence Beowulf strode over the grass meadow, the warrior proud of his gold, glorying in treasure. The sea-goer riding at anchor awaited its lord. Then Hrothgar's gift was often praised on the voyage. That was a king blameless in all ways, till old age, which has done hurt to many, robbed him of the joys of strength.

XXVIII

THEN the troop of exceeding brave warriors came to the flood; they bore ring-woven corslets, locked shirts of mail. The watchman spied the return of the earls as erstwhile he did.

He did not salute the strangers from the edge of the cliff with insult, but rode towards them; he told the people of the Weders that the warriors

with gleaming armour went welcome to the ship. Then the spacious ship laden with war garments was on the sand, the ring-prowed vessel with horses and treasures; the mast towered aloft above Hrothgar's precious hoardings.

He gave to the guardian of the ship a sword bound with gold, so that afterwards on the mead-bench he was the more esteemed for the treasure, the ancient sword. He embarked on the ship, to plough the deep water; left the land of the Danes. Then by the mast was a sea-cloth, a sail bound by a rope. The timbers creaked; the wind over the billows did not force the wave-floater from her course. The sea-goer went on her way, the foamy-necked one floated forth over the waves, the boat with bound prow over the ocean-streams, till they could see the cliffs of the Geats, the well-known headlands. The boat drove ashore; urged by the wind it rested on the land.

Quickly the haven-watchman, who for a long time had gazed out afar at the waters expecting the dear men, was ready by the sea. He bound the broad-bosomed ship to the sand firmly with anchor-bonds, lest the might of the waves should drive away the winsome vessel. Then he bade the treasure of chieftains, adornments and beaten gold, to be carried up. He had not far to go thence to seek the giver of treasure, Hygelac, son of Hrethel, where he dwells at home, himself with his comrades near the sea-wall.

The house was splendid, the ruler a mighty king in the high hall, Hygd very young, wise, high-minded,

although she, the daughter of Hæreth, had lived few years in the stronghold. Yet was she not petty, nor too grudging in gifts and treasures to the people of the Geats. She, the splendid queen of the people, had not the pride or the dread hostility of Thryth. No brave one of the dear comrades, except the mighty prince, durst venture to look upon her openly with his eyes; but he might count upon deadly bonds hand-woven made ready for him. Quickly after that the wrong-doer was destined to the sword, so that the inlaid brand might give judgment, might proclaim the deadly evil. Such is not queenly usage for a woman to practise, though she is splendid; that she who was meant to establish peace should seek the life of a dear subject because of fancied wrong. In truth the kinsmen of Hemming detested that.

Men at their ale-drinking told another tale, that she brought less evils on the people, crafty acts of malice, as soon as she was given, gold-adorned, to the young warrior, to the brave chieftain, when by her father's counsel she sought in her journey the hall of Offa over the yellow flood, where afterwards on the throne she well employed while she lived what was granted her in life, a good famous woman. She kept a noble love towards the prince of heroes, the best, as I have heard, of all mankind, of the race

Dread hostility of Thryth. Thrytho was queen of Offa, king of the Angles in the fourth century. Her fierce cruelty is contrasted with Hygd's gracious kindness.

of men between the seas. For Offa was a skilled spearman, widely honoured for gifts and victories; he ruled his realm with wisdom. From him sprang Eomær for a help to heroes, kinsman of Hemming, grandson of Garmund, mighty in onslaught.

XXIX

THEN the bold man went himself with his troop to tread the meadow by the sea, the wide shores. The world-candle shone, the sun bright from the south. They went on their way; quickly they marched till they heard that the protector of earls, the slayer of Ongentheow, the worthy young war-king, was bestowing rings in the court. Beowulf's arrival was quickly proclaimed to Hygelac, that the defender of warriors, the shield-comrade, was come alive to the palace there, to the court, unscathed from the battle-play.

With speed, as the mighty one ordered, a space was cleared within the hall for the new-comers.⁴ Then he who survived the combat sat down opposite him, kinsman opposite kinsman, when in solemn speech with chosen words he greeted his gracious lord. The daughter of Hæreth went about throughout that hall-building with mead-vessels; she loved the people, bore the flagon to the hands of the Heath-dwellers. Hygelac began graciously to question his

companion in the high hall; desire to know the exploits of the Sea-Geats was strong upon him.

“How fared ye on the voyage, dear Beowulf, when on a sudden thou hadst desire to seek combat afar over the salt water, warfare at Heorot? Surely thou hast somewhat mended for Hrothgar, the famous prince, his wide-known sorrow? In my heart’s grief for that I was troubled with surgings of sorrow; I put no trust in my loved man’s venture; long while I besought thee that thou shouldst have nought to do with the murderous monster, let the South-Danes themselves fight out the struggle with Grendel. I utter thanks to God, that it is granted me to behold thee unscathed.”

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: “That is known, my lord Hygelac, to many men, the famous encounter; what struggle there was between Grendel and me in that place, where he brought very many sorrows upon the victorious Scyldings, lasting oppression. I avenged all that. Thus none of Grendel’s kin upon earth has cause to boast of that uproar at dawn, not he who lives longest of the loathly race, snared in sin.

“Even there did I come to that ring-hall to greet Hrothgar. Straightway the famous son of Healfdene, when he knew my purpose, assigned me a seat beside his own son. His troop was making merry; I have never seen under the vault of heaven greater mead-joy of men sitting in hall. At times the famous queen, she who establishes peace among the peoples, moved throughout the hall, encouraged the young men;

often she gave a ring to a warrior ere she went to her seat. At times Hrothgar's daughter bore the ale-flagon before the veterans, to the earls in the high places; then I heard men sitting in hall name Freawaru, where she bestowed the nail-studded vessel on the heroes; she, young, gold-adorned, is promised to the gracious son of Froda. The friend of the Scyldings, the ruler of the realm has brought that about, and counts it a gain that he should settle with the woman a part of his deadly feuds and struggles. It is always a rare thing, when a little while after the fall of the prince the murderous spear sinks to rest, even though the bride is of worth.

She, young, gold-adorned. Beowulf foretells here the feud between Hrothgar and his son-in-law Ingeld, the Heathobard. A previous quarrel between the Danes and the Heathobards, in which Ingeld's father, Froda, had been killed, has been ended by Hrothgar's daughter marrying Ingeld. But some young Dane, Beowulf foresees, will proudly wear in Ingeld's hall treasures won from the Heathobards in the former fight. Some old unforgiving warrior will urge Ingeld to revenge such insult; the young Dane will be killed, and the feud will break out again.

Son of Froda. Froda, prince of the Heathobards, is killed in fight against the Danes. To heal the feud Hrothgar gives his daughter Freawaru in marriage to Froda's son, Ingeld, who for a space forgets his father's death. Incited by an old warrior, Ingeld attacks the Danes. This renewal of the feud is referred to in Section ii., and also in the Old English poem, *Widsith*.

XXX

“THAT may rankle with the prince of the Heathobards and each thane among the people, when he goes in hall with the bride, that a noble scion of the Danes should tend the warriors. On him gleams the armour of his forefathers, hard and ringmarked, the treasure of the Heathobards, whilst they were able to wield those weapons, until they led their dear comrades and themselves to ruin at the shield-play.

“Then an old spear-warrior who gazes on the treasure, who bears in mind all the slaughter of men, speaks at the beer-drinking—grim is his heart—he begins in mournful mood to test the thoughts of the young warrior by the musings of his mind, to stir up evil strife—and he utters these words:

“‘Canst thou, my friend, recognise the sword, the precious blade, thy father bore to battle, where the Danes slew him when under his helmet for the last time; the bold Scyldings held the field when Withergyld lay low, after the fall of heroes. Now some youth or other of those murderers exulting in his adornments walks here in the hall; boasts of the slaughter and wears the treasure, which thou shouldst rightfully own.’

“Thus at all times he admonishes and stirs up memories with baneful words till the season comes when the bride’s thane slumbers, stained with blood

after the sword-stroke, his life forfeited because of her father's deeds. The other escapes with his life, he knows the country well. Then on both sides are broken the solemn oaths of earls. Afterwards deadly hatreds surge up against Ingeld, and his love for his wife grows cooler from his anguish of mind. Wherefore I look not for the good-will of the Heathobards, nor for much loyalty, void of malice, to the Danes, nor firm friendship.

"I shall speak on once again about Grendel, that thou, the giver of treasure, mayest know well what was later the issue of the hand-struggle of heroes.

"After the jewel of the sky glided over the fields, the monster came raging, the dread night-foe, to seek us out, where safe and sound we held the hall. There was war fatal to Hondscioh, a violent death to the doomed man. He was the first to fall, the girded warrior. Grendel devoured him, the famous liege-man; he swallowed the whole body of the loved man. Nevertheless the bloody-toothed slayer, his thought set on evil, was not minded to go out again from the gold-hall, empty-handed; but, strong in his might, he pitted himself against me, laid hold with ready hand. A pouch hung wide and wondrous, made firm with artful clasps; it was all cunningly devised by the power of the devil and with dragon skins. He, the savage worker of deeds, purposed to put me into it, though guiltless, with many others: it could not come to pass thus when I stood upright in my wrath.

“It is too long to tell how I gave requital to the people’s foe for every ill deed. There, my prince, did I bring honour on thy people by my deeds. He escaped forth; for a short space he enjoyed the pleasures of life; yet his right hand remained in Heorot for a token of him; and he, departing thence wretched, sank down, sad in mind, to the bottom of the mere.

“When morning came and we had sat down to the banquet, the friend of the Scyldings rewarded me richly for the deadly onslaught with beaten gold, with many treasures. There was singing and merriment. An aged Scylding of great experience told tales of long ago. At times one bold in battle drew sweetness from the harp, the joy-wood; at times wrought a measure true and sad; at times the large-hearted king told a wondrous story in fitting fashion. At times again an old warrior bowed down with age began to speak to the youths of prowess in fight; his heart swelled within him, when, old in years, he brought to mind many things.

“Thus we took our pleasure there the livelong day, till another night came to men. Then forthwith again Grendel’s mother was ready to avenge her grief; sorrowful, she journeyed. Death, the hostility of the Weders, had carried off her son. The monstrous woman avenged her child, she slew a warrior in her might. There life went out from Æschere, a wise councillor through many years. Nor, when morning came, might they, the men of the Danes, consume with fire him who had been made powerless by death;

nor lay the loved man on the pyre. She bore off that body in a fiend's embrace under the mountain stream. That was to Hrothgar the heaviest of the sorrows, which for a long while had laid hold on the prince of the people. Then the prince, lamenting, entreated me by thy life, that, in the press of the floods, I should perform a deed of prowess, should hazard my life, should achieve an heroic exploit. He promised me reward. Then I found the grim, terrible guardian of the depths of the surging water, who is known far and wide. There for a space was hand-to-hand grappling; the water welled with blood, and in that hall in the depths I cut off the head of Grendel's mother with a gigantic sword; with violence I tore her life from her; I was not yet doomed to death, but the protector of earls, the son of Healfdene, gave me again many a treasure.

XXXI

"Thus did the king of the people live as was fitting; in no way did I lose the rewards, the guerdon of my strength; but he, the son of Healfdene, gave me treasures into my own keeping. Them I will bring and gladly proffer to thee, king of warriors. Once more all favours come from thee. I have few close kinsmen save thee, Hygelac."

Then he commanded to be brought in the boar-image, the banner, the helmet riding high in battle, the grey corslet, the splendid war-sword. Afterwards he spoke a measure:

"Hrothgar, the wise prince, gave me this battle garment; he expressly bade that I should first declare his good-will to thee. He said that king Heorogar, prince of the Scyldings, had it, the breast-armour, for a long space; that nevertheless he would not give it to his son, the bold Heorowearð, though he was loyal to him. Use all things well."

I heard that four horses, reddish yellow, every whit alike, came next in order; he gave him possession of steeds and stores; thus must a kinsman do, and not weave a cunning net for another, prepare death for a comrade with secret guile. To Hygelac, stout in fight, his nephew was very loyal, and each was mindful of the other's pleasure.

I heard that he presented to Hygd that neck-band, the precious, wondrous treasure, which Wealtheow, the prince's daughter, gave him, together with three steeds full of grace and furnished with gleaming saddles. When she had taken the ring her breast was made fair.

Thus the son of Ecgtheow, a man famous in battle, was bold in brave deeds; he lived honourably; never did he slay his hearth-companions in his drunkenness; his was not a savage mind, but, fearless in fight, he guarded the precious gift which God had given him with the greatest strength among men.

Long was he despised, for the men of the Geats accounted him worthless; nor was the lord of troops minded to do him much honour on the mead-bench; they thought indeed that he was slothful, an unfit chieftain. A recompense came to the famous man for every slight.

Then the protector of earls, the king mighty in battle, bade them bring in the sword of Hrethel, decked with gold; there was not at that time with the Geats a better treasure among swords; he laid that in Beowulf's bosom, and gave him seven thousand measures of land, a house and princely rank. To them both in that country land, domain, ancestral claims, had come by natural right, but more to Hygelac, a wide realm, in that he was the more illustrious.

— That came to pass in later days among the warriors, when Hygelac was laid low and battle-swords slew Heardred under cover of his shield, after the bold battle-heroes, the warlike Scylfings, sought him mid his victorious troop, pressed hard in fight the nephew of Hereric. Afterwards the wide realm came under Beowulf's sway; well did he rule for fifty years. He was then an aged king, an old guardian of the land, till a dragon which guarded treasure in a burial mound, a steep rock, began to show his might on the dark nights. A pathway lay beneath, unknown to men; some man entered there, greedily seized the

The warlike Scylfings. The Scylfings are the Swedes who lived just north of the Geats.

pagan hoard . . . tricked the keeper of the treasure with thievish cunning while he slept . . . so that he was enraged.

XXXII

HE who did himself sore hurt did not violate the dragon's hoard eagerly of his own free will; but some thane of the sons of heroes was fleeing in great distress from hostile blows, and pressed down by his guilt, lacking a shelter, the man took hiding there. Straightway he looked in . . . dread of the monster lay upon him, yet in his misery . . . then the sudden attack seized him. . . .

There were in the cave many such ancient treasures, which in days gone by some men carefully hid there, great relics of a noble race, precious store.

Death took them all off in past times, and still that one veteran of the people who tarried there longest, a watchman wearying for his friends, looked toward the like fate, that but for a short space he might have sway over the long-gathered treasures. The barrow stood all ready on open ground, hard by the waves, newly-raised near the headland, strong in artful barriers. Therein the guardian of the rings bore the precious heap of the treasures of earls, of beaten gold. Few words he spoke.

"Now, earth, do thou hold, now that heroes cannot, the wealth of earls! Lo! valiant men erstwhile took it from thee. Death in war, a sweeping slaughter, took off each of the men, each of my people, who gave up this life; they had seen joy in hall. I have no one who can wield the sword or polish the golden vessel, the precious flagon; the old warriors have departed. The stout helmet adorned with gold must be reft of its beaten plates. The polishers slumber who should make splendid the battle-masks; and the corslet likewise, which endured the stroke of swords in war mid the cracking of shields, follows the warrior to decay. The coat of mail cannot journey afar by the side of heroes after the passing of the warrior. There is no joy of the harp, delight of the timbrel, nor does the good hawk sweep through the hall, nor the swift steed stamp in the court. Violent death has caused to pass many generations of men."

Thus, sad in mind, the latest left of all lamented his sorrow; day and night he wept joyless, till the surge of death touched his heart. The old twilight-foe, the naked hostile dragon, who seeks out barrows, flaming as he goes, who flies by night compassed with fire, found the costly treasure. Him the dwellers in the land greatly fear. He must needs seek the hoard in the earth, where, old in years, he holds possession of the pagan gold; nor shall he profit one whit by that. - Thus did the people's foe guard that mighty treasure-house in the earth for three hundred years, till a man angered him in mind. He bore the plated

goblet to his master, begged his lord for protection. Then the treasure was found, the hoard of rings was lessened; the boon was granted to the unhappy man. For the first time the prince beheld the ancient work of men.

Then the dragon awoke, wrath was rekindled; he sprang along the rock; brave in heart, he came upon the enemy's foot-track; he had stepped with stealthy craft near the dragon's head. Thus may a man, not destined to fall, who relies on the Almighty's protection, easily survive sorrow and exile.

The treasure-guardian, sore and savage in mind, made eager search along the ground; was set on finding the man, him who had done him scathe while he slept; often he made a whole circuit of the mound outside. There was no man in that waste place. Yet he was keen for the conflict, the work of war; at times he turned to the barrow, sought the treasure. Forthwith he found that some man had ransacked the gold, the rich stores. With difficulty did the treasure-guardian delay till evening came; then wrathful was the warden of the barrow, the foul creature was determined to avenge with fire the precious flagon.

Then day had departed, as the dragon desired; no longer would he wait on the wall, but went forth with fire, furnished with flame. The first onslaught was terrifying to the people in the land, even as it was speedily ended with sorrow for their giver of treasure.

Then the monster began to belch forth flames, to

burn the bright dwellings. The flare of the fire brought fear upon men. The loathly air-flier wished not to leave aught living there. The warring of the dragon was widely seen, the onslaught of the cruel foe far and near, how the enemy of the people of the Geats wrought despite and devastation. He hastened back to the hoard, to his hidden hall ere it was day. He had compassed the dwellers in the land with fire, with flames and with burning; he trusted in the barrow, in bravery and the rampart. His hope deceived him.

XXXIII

THEN quickly the terror was made known to Beowulf according to the truth, that his own abode, the best of buildings, the gift-throne of the Geats, was melting in the surges of flame. That was sorrow to the good man's soul, greatest of griefs to the heart. The wise man thought that, breaking established law, he had bitterly angered God, the Lord everlasting. His breast was troubled within by dark thoughts, as was not his wont.

The fire-dragon had destroyed with flames the stronghold of his subjects, the land by the sea from without, the country-side. The warlike king, the prince of the Weders, gave him requital for that. Then the protector of warriors, the lord of earls,

bade an iron shield, a splendid war-targe, to be wrought for him. Full well he knew that wood could not help him; linden wood against fire. The chieftain long famous was fated to endure the end of fleeting days, of life in the world, and the dragon with him, though for long space he had held the treasure-store.

Then the prince of rings scorned to seek the far-flier with a troop of men, with a great host. He feared not the fight, nor did he account as aught the valour of the dragon, his power and prowess; because ere this, defying danger, he had come through many onslaughts, wild attacks, when he, the man of victory, purged Hrothgar's hall, and in war killed with his grip the kin of Grendel, the hateful race.

That was not the most paltry of hand-to-hand struggles, where they slew Hygelac, when the king of the Geats, the friendly prince of the peoples, the son of Hrethel, died in the rushes of battle in the land of the Frisians, his blood shed by the sword, beaten down by the brand. Beowulf came thence by his own strength; swam over the sea. Alone he held on his arm thirty suits of armour when he set out on the sea. The Hetware, who bore the linden shields forward against him, had no cause to boast of the battle on foot. Few escaped from that battle-hero to seek their home. The son of Ecgtheow swam over the stretch of the gulfs, the hapless solitary man

That was not the most paltry. This expedition of Hygelac was historical and occurred between 512 and 520 A.D. The scene of the fighting was the Netherlands.

back to his people, where Hygd tendered him treasure and kingdom, rings and the throne; she did not trust her son, that he could hold his fatherland against hostile hosts, now that Hygelac was dead.

Yet the unhappy men could in no way win the chieftain's consent that he would be lord over Heardred, or that he would elect to rule the realm. Nevertheless he upheld him among the people with friendly counsel, graciously with support, until Heardred grew older; he ruled the Weder-Geats. Exiles, the sons of Ohtere, sought him over the sea. They had risen against the protector of the Scylfings, the best of sea-kings who gave out treasure in Sweden, a famous prince. That ended his life. Deadly wounds from sword-slashes he, the son of Hygelac, gained there for his hospitality; and the son of Ongentheow departed again to seek his home when Heardred was laid low; he let Beowulf hold the throne, rule over the Geats. That was a good king.

Sought him over the sea. Eanmund and Eadgils rebel against their uncle Onela, King of Sweden; and flee to the Geats, where Heardred shelters them. Onela follows with an army, attacks and kills Heardred. It is in this battle that Weohstan kills Eanmund (Section xxxvi.). Onela returns to Sweden, leaving Beowulf undisturbed as Heardred's successor. Later Beowulf befriends Eadgils, who, after conquering and killing Onela, becomes King of Sweden.

XXXIV

IN after days he forgot not requital for the prince's fall; he became a friend to the wretched Eadgils. He aided the son of Ohtere overseas with a troop, with warriors and weapons. He took vengeance afterwards with cold, sad marches; he deprived the king of life.

Thus he, the son of Ecgtheow, had survived every onslaught, dread battles, mighty ventures, until that day when he was to encounter the dragon. The lord of the Geats went then with eleven others, raging with anger, to behold the dragon. He had heard then whence the feud arose, the hostility of warriors; the famous costly vessel came into his possession through the hand of the finder.

He who brought about the beginning of that strife, fettered, sad in mind, was the thirteenth man in the troop; he was forced, though in misery, to show the way. He went against his will, till he could spy that cave, the barrow under the ground, hard by the surge of the waters, the struggle of the waves. Within it was full of jewels and wire ornaments. The monstrous guardian, the ready fighter, grown old beneath the earth, held the treasures. That was no easy matter for any man to enter there.

The king, mighty in onslaught, sat down then on the headland; whilst the gold-friend of the Geats

wished good fortune to his hearth-companions. His mind was sad, restless, brooding on death. Fate exceeding near which was destined to come on the old man, to seek the treasure of his soul, to part asunder life from the body. Not for long after that was the chieftain's spirit clothed in flesh.

Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow: "In my youth I came through many rushes of war, times of combat. I remember all that. I was seven years old when the prince of treasures, the friendly ruler of the peoples, took me from my father; King Hrethel brought me up and fostered me, bestowed on me treasure and banqueting, bore in mind our kinship; in his life I was no less loved by him, a child in the court, than any of his children, Herebeald and Hæthcyn, or my Hygelac. For the eldest a bed of death was made ready by deeds not fit for a kinsman, when Hæthcyn smote him with curved bow, his friendly prince with an arrow; he missed his mark and shot his kinsman, one brother the other with bloody shaft. That was a violent deed not to be atoned for by gifts, cunningly-wrought, weighing sore on the heart. Yet in spite of that the chieftain must needs pass from life unavenged.

"Thus it is sad for an aged man to endure, that his son in his youth should swing from the gallows. Then he makes a measure, a song of sorrow, when his son hangs, a delight for the raven, and he, aged and full of years, can in no way bring him help. He is ever reminded each morning of his son's death; he

cares not to await the birth of another son in his court after the one has made acquaintance with evil deeds by the agony of death. Sorrowful he gazes on his son's room, the deserted wine-hall, a resting-place for the winds, reft of noise. The horsemen slumber, the heroes in their graves; there is no music of the harp, joy in the palace, as there was of yore."

XXXV

"HE goes then to his sleeping-place, sings a song of sorrow, one man for another; his lands and dwelling seemed all too spacious for him. Thus did the protector of the Weders bear surging sorrow in his heart for Herebeald; he could no whit avenge the murderous deed on the slayer. Nor could he work hurt to the warrior, though he was not dear to him. Then with that grief which came sorely upon him, he forsook joy of men, chose God's light; left to his sons, as a worthy man does, land and cities, when he departed from life.

/"Then guilt and strife came to be the portion of Swedes and Geats over the wide water, a bitter hostility after Hrethel died, and Ongentheow's sons were brave and bold in fight. They did not wish to

Swedes and Geats. For the wars of Swedes and Geats see Section xl.

keep up friendship across the sea, but often they cunningly contrived dread slaughter near Hreosnaburh. That did my friendly kinsmen avenge, the feud and the outrage, as was well known, though one of them paid for it at a dear price with his life. To Hæthcyn, lord of the Geats, war proved fatal. Then I heard that in the morning one brother avenged the other on the slayer with the sword-edge. There Ongentheow seeks out Eofor. The war-helmet was shattered, the aged Scylfing fell mortally stricken; the hand forgot not the feud; it drew not back from the deadly blow.

“With gleaming sword I repaid in war, as chance was given me, the treasures he bestowed on me. He gave me land, domain, an ancestral seat. There was no need for him to seek among the Gepidæ, or the Spear-Danes, or in the kingdom of the Swedes for less worthy warriors, to buy them with treasure. Ever I wished to be before him on foot, alone in the van, and so shall I do battle while my life lasts, while this sword endures that early and late has often followed me. Afterwards I slew Dæghrefn, the champion of the Hugas, in the presence of the veterans. He was not able at all to bring adornments, breast ornaments, to the king of the Frisians, but the keeper of the banner, the chieftain in his might, fell amid the warriors. The sword was not the slayer, but my battle-grip crushed the surges of his heart and his body. Now the edge of the sword, the hand and the keen blade, shall wage war for the treasure.”

Beowulf spoke, he uttered pledges for the last time: "In my youth I passed through many battles; yet I, aged protector of the people, wish to seek the fight, to achieve the heroic deed, if the foul foe comes out of his cave to face me."

Then for the last time he greeted each of the men, brave bearers of helmets, dear comrades: "I was not minded to bear a sword, a weapon against the dragon, if I knew how else I could make good my boast against the monster, as erstwhile I did against Grendel; but here I expect hot battle-flame, a blast of breath, and poison. Wherefore I bear shield and corslet. I will not give back the space of a foot before the keeper of the barrow, but the fight shall be between us at the wall, as Fate, the master of every man, shall decide for us. I am brave in mind, so that I can keep from boasting against the winged fighter. Do ye, clad in corslets, warriors in battle-array, bide on the barrow to see which of us two can better survive wounds after the deadly onslaught. This is not your venture, nor is it in any man's power, except mine alone, to strive with his strength against the monster, to perform heroic deeds. With my might I shall gain the gold; or war, a perilous violent death, shall carry off your prince."

Then by his shield the strong warrior arose, stern under his helmet; he bore the battle-corslet under the rocky cliffs; he trusted in the strength of a single man. Such is no coward's venture.

Then he, excellent in virtues, who had survived

very many combats, wild attacks, when foot-warriors crashed together, saw a stone arch standing by the wall, a stream gushing out thence from the barrow. The surge of the spring was hot with battle-fires; by reason of the dragon's flame he could not endure for any time unburnt the recess near the treasure. The prince of the Weder-Geats, when he was angered, let a word go out from his breast; the strong-hearted man was wrathful; his voice loud in battle went in resounding under the grey stone.

Hate was roused, the treasure-guardian heard the speech of a man; there was no longer time to seek friendship; first the monster's breath, hot sweat of battle, issued out from the stone; the earth resounded. The warrior, lord of the Geats, swung his shield under the barrow against the dread creature. Then the heart of the coiling dragon was ready to seek strife. The valiant warlike king first brandished the sword, the ancient blade, not dull in its edges. Each of the two hostile-minded ones felt fear of the other. The ruler of friends stood staunchly against his high shield, when the dragon quickly coiled together; he waited in his war-gear. Then striding amid flames, contorted he went, hastening to his fate. The shield guarded life and body well for the famous prince less time than he wished. There then for the first time he had to show his strength without Fate allotting him fame in battle. The lord of the Geats raised up his hand, he struck the dread gleaming monster with the precious sword, so that the bright edge turned on the

bone; it bit less keenly than its king, hard pressed by trouble, had need. Then after the battle-stroke the guardian of the treasure was in savage mood; he cast forth deadly fire; far leaped the war-flames. The gold-friend of the Geats boasted not of famous victories; the naked battle-blade failed at need, as it should not have done, the long-famous brand. That was no easy step for the famous son of Ecgtheow to consent to yield that ground; against his will he must needs inhabit a dwelling elsewhere; thus must every man forsake fleeting days.

It was not long till the fighters closed again. The treasure-guardian took heart anew. His breast laboured with breathing. He who before held sway over the people suffered anguish, ringed round with fire.

No whit did his comrades, sons of chieftains, stand him in a band with valour, but they took to the wood, they hid for their lives. In one of them the mind was roused to face sorrows. In him who well considers nothing can ever stifle kinship.

XXXVI

HE was called Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, a valued shield-warrior, prince of the Scylfings, kinsman of Ælfhere; he saw his lord suffering the heat under his war-helm. Then he called to mind the favour

which formerly he had bestowed on him, the rich dwelling-place of the Wægmundings, all the rights his father possessed. He could not then hold back; his hand seized the shield, the yellow linden wood, drew the ancient sword, that was among men a relic of Eanmund, son of Ohtere. Weohstan slew him in battle with the edge of the sword, a friendless exile, and bore off from his kin the bright gleaming helm, the ringed corslet, the gigantic old sword that Onela gave him, his kinsman's war-trappings, ready battle-equipment. He spoke not of the feud, though he had killed his brother's child. Many years he held the adornments, brand and corslet until his son could achieve mighty deeds like his old father. Then when he departed from life, old in his passing hence, he gave among the Geats an exceeding number of battle-garments.

That was the first time that the young warrior was to stand the rush of battle with his prince. His spirit did not weaken, nor did his kinsman's relic fail in the fight. The dragon discovered that when they had come together. Wiglaf spoke, uttered many fitting words to his comrades; his mind was sad: "I remember that time when we were drinking mead, when in the beer-hall we promised our lord who gave us these rings, that we would requite him for the war-gear, the helms and sharp swords, if need such as this came upon him. He chose us among the host of his own will for this venture, he reminded us of famous deeds and gave me these treasures, the more because

he counted us good spear-warriors, bold bearers of helmets, though our lord, the protector of the people, purposed to achieve this mighty task unaided, because among men he had wrought most famous deeds, daring ventures. Now the day has come when our lord needs the strength of valiant warriors. Let us go to help our warlike prince, while the fierce dread flame yet flares. God knows that, as for me, I had much rather the flame should embrace my body with my gold-giver. It does not seem fitting to me, that we should bear shields back to our dwelling, if we cannot first fell the foe, guard the life of the prince of the Weders. I know well that, from his former deeds, he deserves not to suffer affliction alone among the warriors of the Geats, to fall in fight; sword and helmet, corslet and shirt of mail shall be shared by us both."

He went then through the deadly reek, bore his helmet to the aid of the prince, few words he spoke: "Dear Beowulf, achieve all things well, as thou saidst long ago in thy youth, that thou wouldst not let thy repute fail, while life lasted; now, resolute chieftain, mighty in deeds, thou must guard thy life with all thy strength; I will help thee."

After these words the dragon came raging once more, the dread evil creature, flashing with surges of flame, to seek out his foes, the hated men. The shield was burnt away to the rim by waves of fire. The corslet could not give help to the young shield-warrior; but the youth fought mightily beneath his

kinsman's buckler, when his own was consumed by the flames. Then again the warlike king was mindful of fame; he struck with his battle-sword with mighty strength, so that, urged by the force of hate, it stuck in his head. Nægling burst apart; Beowulf's sword, ancient and grey, failed in fight. It was not granted to him that the edges of swords might aid him in the struggle, when he bore to battle the weapon hardened by blood of wounds; his hand was too strong, he who, as I have heard, tried every sword beyond its strength. He was in evil plight.

Then for the third time the enemy of the people, the bold fire-dragon, was mindful of fighting; he rushed on the mighty man, when a chance offered, hot and fierce in fight; he clutched his whole neck with sharp teeth; Beowulf grew stained with his life-blood; the gore welled out in surges.

XXXVII

THEN I heard that, in the peril of the people's prince, the exalted earl showed courage, strength and daring, as was his nature. He guarded not his head, but the brave man's hand burned when he helped his kinsman, so that he, the man in his armour, beat down a little the hostile creature; and the sword sank in, gleaming and plated; and the fire after began to abate. Then

once more the king himself was master of his thoughts; he brandished the battle-knife, keen and sharp for the fray, which he wore on his corslet; the protector of the Weders cut through the dragon in the midst. They felled the foe; force drove out his life; and then they both had slain him, the noble kinsman. Such should a man be, a thane in time of need.

That was the last victory for the prince by his own deeds, the end of his work in the world. Then the wound which erstwhile the earth-dragon dealt him began to burn and swell. He found forthwith that the poison was working with pestilent force within his breast. Then the chieftain went till, taking wise thought, he sat down on a seat by the wall; he gazed on the work of giants, saw how the eternal earth-building held within stone arches, firm fixed by pillars. Then with his hands the exceeding good thane bathed him with water, the blood-stained famous prince, his friendly lord, wearied with battle; and loosed his helm.

Beowulf spoke, he talked of his wound, of the hurt sore unto death; he knew well that he had ended his days, his joy on earth. Then all his length of days was passed away, death was exceeding close: "Now I would give armour to my son, if it had been so granted that any heir, sprung from my body, should succeed me. I have ruled this people for fifty years. There was no people's king among the nations about who durst come against me with swords, or oppress me with dread. I have lived the appointed span in

my land, guarded well my portion, contrived no crafty attacks, nor sworn many oaths unjustly. Stricken with mortal wounds, I can rejoice in all this; wherefore the Ruler of men has no cause to blame me with the slaughter of kinsmen, when my life passes out from my body. Now, dear Wiglaf, do thou go quickly to behold the hoard under the grey stone, now that the dragon lies low, sleeps sorely wounded, spoiled of the treasure. Haste now that I may see the old riches, the golden treasure, may eagerly gaze on the bright gems of artful work, so that after winning the great store of jewels, I may the more easily leave life and land, which long I have guarded."

XXXVIII

THEN I heard that the son of Weohstan after the speeches quickly obeyed his wounded lord, stricken in battle, bore his ringed corslet, his woven shirt of mail, under the roof of the barrow. Then, exulting in victory, the brave kinsman-thane, as he went by the seat, beheld many costly ornaments, gold gleaming along the ground, wondrous work on the wall, and the lair of the dragon, the old flier at twilight; vessels standing, goblets of olden time, lacking a furbisher, reft of their ornaments. There was many

a helm, ancient and rusty, many bracelets cunningly bound. Treasure, gold on the ground, may easily madden any man; conceal it who will!

Likewise he saw a banner all gilt lying high above the hoard, greatest of wonders wrought by hand, cunningly woven in stitches. A gleam shone forth from it so that he might see the floor, behold the jewels. There was no trace of the dragon there, for the sword had carried him off. Then I heard that one man rifled the hoard, the old work of giants in the mound, laid in his bosom flagons and dishes at his own will; took also the banner, brightest of beacons. The sword of the old chieftain—its edge was iron—had earlier laid low him who long while was guardian of the treasures; he bore with him to guard the treasure a dread hot flame, blazing out in battle at midnight, till violently he perished. The messenger was in haste, eager to return, urged on by the treasures. Desire was strong on him to know whether he, the courageous one, should find the mortally-wounded prince of the Weders alive in that place where erstwhile he left him.

Then with the treasures he found the famous prince, his lord bleeding, at the end of his life. Again he began to dash water upon him, until the beginning of a word escaped from his breast-hoard. Then the warrior spoke, the aged man in his pain; he gazed on the gold.

“I give thanks in words to the Prince, the King of glory, the eternal Lord for all the adornments which

I behold here, that I have been able to win such for my people before my death-day. Now have I sold my old life for the hoard of treasures; attend ye now to the need of my people. No longer may I tarry here. Bid the men famed in battle raise at the sea-headland a gleaming mound after the burning. It shall tower high on Hronesness, a reminder to my people, so that sea-farers may afterwards call it Beowulf's barrow when from afar the ships drive over the dark sea."

The prince of brave mind took from his neck a golden ring, gave to the thane, the young spear-warrior, his helm bright with gold, his ring and corslet; bade him use them well: "Thou art the last of our race, of the Wægmundings. Fate has swept all my kinsmen away to their destiny, earls in their might; I must needs follow them."

That was the last word from the old man's thoughts, before he sought the pyre, the hot, fierce surges of flame. His soul passed from his breast to seek the splendour of the saints.

XXXIX

THEN was it sorrow for the young man to see on the earth the man he loved best, his life closed, lying there helpless. The slayer also lay low, the dread earth-dragon, reft of life, vanquished by violence.

No longer could the coiled dragon keep guard over the treasure-stores, but iron blades, sharp battle-notched swords, forged by hammers, had carried him off, so that the wide-flier sank to the ground near the treasure-house, still from his wounds. No more did he wheel in his flight through the air at midnight, no more made his appearance exulting in costly possessions; but he fell to the earth because of the warrior's handiwork. Few of a truth among men, among those of might in the land, as I have heard, though they were eager for all exploits, have succeeded in rushing against the blast of the venomous foe, or seizing with hands the hall of rings, if they found the guardian on watch dwelling in the barrow. Beowulf had paid with his death for the many costly treasures; each had gone to the end of fleeting life.

It was not long then till the cowards left the wood, weak failers in loyalty, the ten together, who durst not before wield spears in their lord's great need; but shamefully they bore their shields, the war-gear, where the old man lay; they looked at Wiglaf. He, the foot-warrior, sat wearied, hard by the prince's shoulders, tried to recall him with water. No whit did he succeed; he could not, though dearly he wished, keep life in the prince on earth; nor alter the will of the Almighty. The might of God was pleased to show its power over all men by its deeds, as He yet does now.

Then a grim speech came readily from the youth to those who erstwhile had lost their courage. Wiglaf

spoke, son of Weohstan, a man sad at heart; he looked at the hated men: "Lo! he, who wishes to tell the truth, can say that the lord who gave you treasures, warlike adornments, wherein ye stand there, when on the ale-bench he often bestowed on men sitting in hall, a prince to his thanes, helmet and corslet, the most excellent he could anywhere find far or near, that doubtless he miserably cast away the garments of war, when battle beset him. The people's king had indeed no cause to boast of his comrades in fight; yet God, the Disposer of victories, granted that he alone with his sword avenged himself, when he had need of might. Small protection to his life could I afford him in the fight, and yet I tried to aid my kinsman beyond my power. When with the sword I smote the deadly foe, he grew ever weaker, his fire surged out less strongly from his breast. Too few protectors pressed round the prince, when the time came upon him. Now the receiving of jewels, giving of swords, all the splendid heritage, and life's necessities, shall pass away from your race. Every man of the people shall wander, stripped of his rights in the land, when chieftains from afar hear of your flight, the inglorious act. Death is better for all earls than a shameful life."

XL

HE bade then the battle be proclaimed in the entrenchment, up over the sea-cliff, where that troop of earls, bearing their shields, sat sad in mind the whole morning, expecting both issues, the death and the return of the loved man. He who rode on the headland held back little of the late tidings, but truthfully he told them all:

“Now is the giver of delights among the people of the Weders, the lord of the Geats, fast in his death-bed, he bides in his slaughterous couch by the deeds of the dragon. By his side lies the deadly foe stricken with knife wounds; he could not in any way deal a wound to the monster with a sword. Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, sits over Beowulf, the earl over the other lifeless one; reverently he keeps watch over friend and foe.

“Now there is prospect of a time of strife for the people, when the fall of the king becomes widely known to Franks and Frisians. The harsh strife with the Hugas was brought about when Hygelac went to the land of the Frisians with a navy, where the Hetware laid him low in battle; they did mightily with their greater numbers, so that the corslet-warrior was forced to yield; he fell mid his troops; the prince gave no adornments to his veterans. To us ever since the good will of Merewoing has been denied.

"Nor do I expect any peace or good faith from the people of Sweden; for it was widely known that Ongentheow robbed Hæthcyn, son of Hrethel, of life near Ravenswood, when the warlike Scylfings first sought in their pride the people of the Geats. Straightway the aged father of Ohtere, old and terrible, dealt him a blow in return, killed the sea-guide, the old man freed the bride, the wife reft of her gold, the mother of Onela and Ohtere; and then he followed his deadly foes till with difficulty they escaped, leaderless, to Ravenswood. Then he besieged with a mighty host those who had escaped the sword, wearied from wounds; often through the livelong night he threatened the wretched band with misery; he said that in the morning he would do them hurt with the edge of the sword; some on the gallows-tree for the sport of the birds. With dawn came relief again to the woeful, when they heard Hygelac's horn and the blare of the trumpet, when the valiant one came on the track of the warriors of the people."

The warlike . . . Geats. The narrative of the battle is somewhat hard to follow. Ongentheow, the Swedish king, attacks Hæthcyn, king of the Geats, and slays him. The leaderless Geats retreat to Ravenswood, where they are rescued by Hygelac. Ongentheow now retires to some sort of fortification, where he is attacked by the Geats. He is assailed by the brothers Eofor and Wulf: he deals Wulf a heavy stroke, but Eofor strikes Ongentheow down.

XLI

“THE blood trail of Swedes and Geats, the deadly attack of men, was widely noted, how the men roused strife between one another. Then the valiant one departed with his kinsmen, the old man very sad, to seek his stronghold. The earl Ongentheow went on further; he had heard of Hygelac’s skill in battle, of the proud man’s war-strength; he relied not on resistance to check the sea-men, to defend treasure, children and wife against the sea-raiders; the aged man turned thence once more behind a rampart. Then chase was given to the men of the Swedes, the banner to Hygelac. Upon that they overran the stronghold after the people of Hrethel had penetrated the fastnesses. There the grey-haired Ongentheow was constrained to tarry by the edge of the sword, so that the people’s king had to suffer the might of Eofor alone. Wulf, son of Wonred, struck him with the sword, so that after the blow the blood gushed from the veins under his hair. Yet was he not daunted, the aged Scylfing, but quickly repaid that deadly stroke with a worse in exchange, as soon as he, the people’s king, turned thither. The strong son of Wonred could not give a blow in return to the old man, for he first clove his helmet on his head, so that, stained with blood, he had to give back: he fell on the ground: he was not doomed yet, but he

revived, though a wound had stricken him. The boldthane of Hygelac, when his brother was laid low, caused his broad sword, old gigantic brand, to crash the massive helmet over the wall of shields; then the king sank down, the protector of the people; he was stricken unto death. Then were there many who bound up his kinsman; they lifted him speedily when space was cleared for them, so that they might hold possession of the battle-field. Then one warrior spoiled another, took from Ongentheow his iron corslet, his sharp hilted sword, and his helm also; bore the trappings of the old man to Hygelac. He received the adornments, and graciously promised him rewards amid the people, and thus did he fulfil it; the lord of the Geats, the son of Hrethel, when he came to his home, rewarded Eofor and Wulf with exceeding rich treasures for that onslaught; to each of them he gave a hundred thousand measures of land and twisted rings; men on earth had no cause to blame him for the gifts, when they fought heroically; and then to Eofor he gave his only daughter, to adorn his dwelling, as a pledge of good-will.

“That is the feud and the hostility, the deadly hatred of man, which I look for, of Swedish men who will come upon us, when they learn that our prince is dead, who erstwhile guarded treasure and kingdom against foes, the bold Scyldings after the fall of heroes, did what was best for the people, and performed heroic deeds more and more.

“Now haste is best, that we should gaze there upon

the people's king, and bring him, who gave us rings, on his way to the pyre. No solitary thing shall be consumed with the brave man, but there is store of treasures, untold gold dearly gained, and now, at the last, rings bought with his own life; the flame shall devour them; the earl shall not wear the treasures as a memorial, nor shall the fair maid bear on her neck the adornment of a circlet, but sad in mind, reft of gold, shall walk in a strange land, not once but oftentimes, now that the leader of the host has done with laughter, joy and merriment. Wherefore many a spear, cold in the morning, shall be grasped with fingers, raised aloft with hands; the sound of the harp shall not rouse the warriors, but the dark raven, ready above the fallen, shall speak many things, shall tell the eagle how he sped at the feasting, when with the wolf he spoiled the slain."

Thus the bold man told evil tidings; he lied not at all in his forecasts and words. The troop all rose up, sadly they went under Earnanæss, with tears welling up, to behold the wonder. Then they found him lifeless on the sand, keeping his helpless couch, him who in former times gave them rings. Then the last of days had come to the valiant one, on which the warlike king, the prince of the Weders, perished a wondrous death. First they saw there a stranger creature, the hateful dragon lying opposite on the ground there: the fire-dragon, the grim dread monster, was scorched with flames; he measured fifty feet long as he lay; often he had taken his

pleasure in the air at night; he had come down again to visit his lair; and now he was firm bound by death; he had taken his last delight in the earth-caves. By him stood goblets and flagons, dishes lay there and costly swords eaten through by rust, as if they had remained there a thousand years in the earth's embrace. (At that time that mighty heritage, gold of men of olden time, had a curse laid upon it, so that none among men might touch that ring-hall, unless God Himself, the true King of victories—He is the helper of heroes—granted to whom He would to lay open the hoard; even to that man who seemed good unto Him.

XLII

THEN it was clear that the way of them, who had wrongfully hidden the jewels under the wall, had not prospered. Long ago the guardian slew some few; then the feud was fiercely revenged. It is unknown where an earl, mighty in valour, may come to the end of life, when he may no longer sit on the mead-bench with his kinsmen. Thus was it with Beowulf, when he sought out the guardian of the barrow and battle; he knew not himself in what way his passing from the world should come about.

Thus did the famous princes, who stored that

there, lay a heavy ban upon it till doomsday, so that the man who should plunder the place should be guilty of sins, confined in cursed places, fast in bonds of hell, smitten with plagues. He would rather not have beheld the gold-treasure, the owner's might.

Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan: "Often must many an earl suffer sorrow through the will of one, as has come upon us. We could not counsel the dear prince, the protector of the kingdom, not to approach the guardian of the gold, but to let him lie there, where long he had been; bide in his dwelling till the end of the world. We have suffered sore fortune; the hoard is seen, grimly won; that fate was too hard which drew the people's king thither. I was within and beheld all that, the stores of the building, when the chance was granted me; in no pleasant way was a passage opened to me in under the earth-wall. In haste I seized a mighty burden of precious treasures in my hands; bore them out hither to my king; he was still living then, wise and clear in mind; the old man in his agony spoke many things, and bade me greet you; ordered that ye should raise on the site of the pyre a high barrow, great and famous, befitting his exploits, even as he was among men the most renowned warrior far and wide throughout the earth, whilst he could enjoy wealth in his castle. Let us now hasten to behold and seek once more the heap of rare gems, the wondrous sight beneath the wall. I will guide you, so that ye may see the rings and broad gold near at hand. Let the bier be made ready,

speedily wrought, when we come out and bear them our prince, the loved man, where long he shall wait in the Almighty's keeping."

Then the son of Weohstan, the hero bold in battle, bade orders be given to many of the men who were owners of dwellings, that they, the leaders of bands, should bring from afar wood for the funeral-fire to where the valiant man lay: "Now shall the fire consume—the dark flame shall tower up—the ruler of warriors, him who often endured the iron shower when the storm of arrows, urged with might, darted over the shield-wall, when the shaft did its office; fitted with feathers, it followed the arrow."

In truth the wise son of Weohstan called out the king's thanes from the troop, the best seven together; he went with the seven under the hostile roof of the foemen; one who went in front bore in his hand a torch. It was not settled by lot then who plundered that hoard when the men saw any part unguarded remaining in the hall, lying there perishing; little did any of them mourn that they bore out quickly the precious treasures; also they shoved the dragon, the monster, over the cliff; they let the wave take him, the flood embrace the guardian of the treasures. There was twisted gold beyond measure loaded on the waggon; the chieftain, the grey-haired warrior, was borne to Hronesness.

XLIII

THEN the people of the Geats made ready for him a pyre firm on the ground, hung round with helmets, battle-targes, bright corslets, as he had craved; then the sorrowing men laid in the midst the famous prince, their loved lord. The warriors began to rouse on the barrow the greatest of funeral fires; the wood-reek mounted up dark above the smoking glow, the crackling flame, mingled with the cry of weeping—the tumult of the winds ceased—until it had consumed the body, hot to the heart. Sad in heart, they lamented the sorrow of their souls, the slaying of their lord; likewise the woman with bound tresses sang a dirge . . . the sky swallowed up the smoke.

Then the people of the Weders wrought a mound, which was lofty and broad, at the edge of the headland, visible far and wide to seafarers; and in ten days they finished the beacon of the man mighty in battle; the remnant of the pyre they compassed round with a wall, as exceeding wise men might most worthily devise it. They laid on the barrow rings and ornaments, all such adornments as men, eager for combat, had erstwhile taken from the hoard; they let the earth keep the treasure of earls, the gold in the ground, where it yet lies, as useless to men as it was before. Then men bold in battle, sons of chieftains, twelve in all, rode about the mound;

they were minded to utter their grief, to lament the king, to make a chant and to speak of the man; they exalted his heroic life and praised his valorous deed with all their strength.

Thus it is fitting that a man should extol his friendly lord in words, should heartily love him, when he must needs depart from his body and pass away. Thus did the men of the Geats, his hearth-companions, bewail the fall of their lord; they said that among the kings of the world he was the mildest of men and most kindly, most gentle to his people and most eager for praise.



QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the differences between Grendel and the dragon?

2. Which is the most interesting of Beowulf's three fights?

3. In his youth Beowulf was apparently lightly esteemed. What other stories do you know where the hero is at first held in contempt?

4. What qualities in a king or a leader are praised in the poem?

5. What does the poem tell us of Beowulf's life before he went to Heorot?

6. What impression do you get of Wealtheow's character?

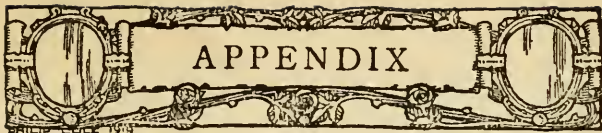
7. Describe a feast in Heorot.

8. What do you learn from *Beowulf* about the weapons and armour of the Danes and Geats?

APPENDIX

A.—THE FIRST ENGLISH POET

B.—THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH



[The following extracts may be found interesting by readers of *The Song of Beowulf*.]

A.—THE FIRST ENGLISH POET

This passage is taken from the "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation," by the Venerable Bede (673-735). It will remind the reader of Hrothgar's minstrel who sang a religious poem about the Creation.

THERE was in the monastery of the abbess (Hilda of Whitby) a certain brother specially endowed and honoured with the grace of God, who was wont to make pious and religious verses: and whatever was interpreted to him out of Scripture he soon afterwards put the same into poetical expressions of much sweetness and humility in English, which was his native language. By his verses the minds of many were often excited to despise the world, and to aspire to heaven.

Others in the English nation attempted, after him, to compose religious poems: but none could ever compare with him, for he did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God: for which reason he never could compose any trivial or vain poem, but only those which related to religion suited his religious tongue.

Having lived in a secular habit till he was well advanced in years, he had never learned anything of versifying; for which reason, being sometimes at entertainments when it was agreed for the sake of mirth that all present should sing in their turns, seeing the

instrument come towards him, he rose up from table and went to his house.

Having done so at a certain time, and gone out of the house where the entertainment was, he went to the cattle-sheds where he had to take care of the cattle that night. He there composed himself to rest at the proper time, when a certain one appeared to him in his sleep, and saluting him by his name, said: "Cædmon, sing me something." He answered, "I cannot sing; for that was the reason why I left the feast and retired to this place, because I could not sing." The other who talked to him replied: "However, you shall sing for me." "What shall I sing?" asked he. "Sing the beginning of created things," said the other. Hereupon Cædmon presently began to sing verses to the praise of God which he had never heard. The purport thereof was this:

Now ought we to praise
The Guardian of the heavenly
kingdom,
The might of the Maker
And the purpose of His mind,
The work of the Father of
Glory,
How He of all wondrous things,
The Everlasting Lord,
Created the beginning.

He first created
For the sons of earth
The heaven as a roof,
The Holy Creator.
Then the earth
The Guardian of Mankind,
The eternal King,
Afterwards made,
A dwelling for men,
The Almighty Lord.

Then he arose from his sleep and remembered all that he had sung in his dream, and soon added much more to the same effect in verse worthy of God.

In the morning he came to the steward, his superior, and having acquainted him with the gift he had received, was conducted to the abbess, by whom he was ordered,

in the presence of many learned men, to tell his dream and repeat the verses, that they might all give their judgment what it was, and whence his verse proceeded. They all concluded that heavenly grace had been conferred on him by our Lord.

They then expounded to him a passage in holy writ, ordering him, if he could, to put the same into verse. Having undertaken it, he went away, and returning the next morning, gave it to them composed in most excellent verse; whereupon the abbess, embracing the grace of God in the man, instructed him to quit the secular habit, and take upon him the monastic life, which, being accordingly done, she sent him among the rest of the brethren in her monastery, and ordered that he should be taught the whole series of sacred history. Thus Cædmon, keeping in mind all he heard, converted the same into most harmonious verse, and sweetly repeating the same, made his masters in their turn his hearers.

He sang the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the history of Genesis, and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the Land of Promise, with many other histories from holy writ.

B.—THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH

In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, under the date 937 A.D., the following verses are inserted instead of the usual record. Each line is divided as in the original Old English poem. And this gives some general idea of the structure of "The Song of Beowulf."

937. This year King Athelstan and Edmund his brother led a force to Brumby, and there fought against Anlaf,¹ and, Christ helping, had the victory; and they there slew five kings and seven earls.

Here Athelstan, king, of earls the lord,
 of heroes the ring-giver, and his brother eke,
 Edmund atheling, life-long glory
 in battle won with edges of swords
 near Brumby² the board-walls they clove,
 they hewed the war-lindens, with leavings of hammers,³
 offspring of Edward such was their noble nature
 from their ancestors, that they in battle oft
 against every foe the land defended,
 hoards and homes. Their foes they crushed,
 the Scottish people and the shipmen
 fated fell: the field did flow
 with warrior's blood, since the sun up
 at morning tide, mighty planet,

¹ King of the Danes in Ireland, who was allied with Constantine, King of the Scots, and Owen, King of Cumbria. Athelstan led the English of Mercia and Wessex.

² Brumby, or Brunanburh, is supposed to have been somewhere in Lancashire.

³ *I.e.*, with swords.

glided o'er ground, God's candle bright,
the eternal Lord's, till the noble creature
sank to her resting. There lay many a warrior
by spears strawn, men of the north
over shield shot; so the Scots eke,
weary, war-sad. West-Saxons onwards
the whole day long, in bands,
pursued the footsteps of the loathed nations;
they hewed the fugitives behind, severely,
with swords mill-sharp. Mercians refused not
the hard hand-play to any heroes,
who with Anlaf over the ocean,
in the ship's bosom, sought this land,
fated to the fight. Five lay
on the battle-field, youthful kings,
by swords in slumber laid, so seven eke
of Anlaf's earls, of the army countless,
shipmen and Scots. There was made flee
the North-men's chieftain,¹ by need constrained,
to the ship's prow with a little band:
the bark drove afloat; the king departed
on the fallow flood, his life preserved.
So there eke the sage came by flight
to his northern home, Constantine,
hoary warrior; he had no cause to boast
the joining of swords; he was of kindred bereft,
of friends bereaved, on the folk-stead
in battle slain; and his son he left
on the slaughter-place mangled with wounds,
young in the fight. He had no cause to boast,
hero grizzly-haired, of the bill-clashing,
the old deceiver; nor Anlaf the more,
with the remnant of their armies; they had no cause for mirth

¹ Anlaf, who went back to Ireland with a mere remnant of his force.

that they in war's works the better men were
in the battle-place, at the conflict of banners,
clashing of spears, meeting of men,
traffic of weapons, that they on the slaughter-field
with Edward's offspring played.
The North-men departed in their nailed barks,
bloody relic of spears, on roaring ocean,
o'er the deep water Dublin to seek,
Ireland once more, shamed in mind.
So too the brothers, both together,
king and atheling, their country sought,
West-Saxons' land, in the war exulting.
They left behind them, the corse to devour,
the sallowy kite, the swarthy raven
with horned neb, and the dusky one,
eagle white-tailed, his meal to enjoy,
greedy war-hawk; and the gray beast,
wolf of the weald. Slaughter greater ne'er was
in this island ever yet
of people slain before this,
by edges of swords, as books us tell,
old writers, since from eastward hither,
Angles and Saxons came to land,
o'er the broad seas, Britain sought,
mighty war-smiths the Welsh o'ercame,
earls eager for glory this land obtained.

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